Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation: A rapid evidence assessment guided by Situational Action Theory

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Scientific report

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Executive summary

Purpose

This report presents the findings of a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the research on the causes of Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR), commissioned by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), UK Home Office.

The project aimed to assess and synthesise current knowledge on AQIR and explore whether knowledge in neighbouring problem areas could inform an understanding of radicalisation, defined as the process by which people acquire a propensity to commit acts of terrorism.

Methodology

A Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of research on the factors and processes involved in AQIR was conducted. It confirmed that scientific research in this area is still in its infancy. A systematic search of the literature identified **16,582 documents of possible interest**. After a quality assessment procedure designed to accommodate the weakness of the evidence-base, **only 15 studies were retained**. They formed the basis of the analytical synthesis of the AQIR process in this report.

A targeted search of neighbouring problem areas (youth gangs, new religious movements and violent radical activism) was also carried out, supplemented by recommendations from subject matter experts.

Analytical framework

A criminological framework known as **Situational Action Theory (SAT) was used to organise an otherwise weak evidence-base**. The authors identified three key categories of problems that must be tackled to understand the AQIR process:

- Which individuals are most vulnerable to the features of settings that promote radicalisation (**the problem of vulnerability**).

- How people, through social and self-selection, come to be exposed to these radicalising settings (**the problem of exposure**).

- How radicalising settings emerge (**the problem of emergence**).

Findings from the REA and literature searches were organised and analysed within these three categories.

Main findings

The purpose of the REA was not to summarise everything known about AQIR, but *what matters about what is known* about AQIR. Findings are best seen as reasoned hypotheses, which can be used to organise a systematic knowledge-base, design further research, and assess present and future prevention strategies.

The evidence-base is weak

- If this REA has one overarching conclusion, it is that **the evidence-base on the causes of AQIR is scientifically weak**. Empirical research is still exploratory rather than explanatory. The problem is compounded by the absence of frameworks linking the levels of explanation (individual, ecological, systemic) by way of explicit mechanisms. Without knowledge of mechanisms, there is no basis from which to design interventions.

But the foundation for a knowledge-base exists

- The same basic processes (vulnerability, exposure, emergence) are at work in the acquisition of an unconventional, often violence-supportive, moral framework in all the problem areas examined. This matters. It means that **knowledge accumulated in neighbouring problem areas, including knowledge about prevention, can be transferred to AQIR**. At the very least, it will serve as a stepping stone in thinking about AQIR and its prevention.

The specificity problem can be addressed

- To acquire a propensity for terrorism, people have to become exposed to terrorism-supportive moral contexts (**exposure**). For them to be exposed, settings with terrorism-supportive moral contexts have to be present in their environment (**emergence**), and they have to come into regular contact with these settings (**vulnerability to selection**). For radicalisation to result from exposure, individuals have to be sensitive to the influence of the terrorism-supportive features of the settings they come into regular contact with (**vulnerability to moral change**).

- If these interconnected processes are understood, it becomes possible to begin to tackle the **problem of specificity**; in other words, to begin to explain why AQIR concerns very few people in certain contexts (for example, in Western societies) despite the fact that many appear to be 'vulnerable'. **The problem of specificity cannot be addressed at the level of individual vulnerability alone**, since the characteristics involved in individual vulnerability are so general and shared across problem areas. This is especially the case when moral and cognitive vulnerability are considered.

- Although key processes are shared, **how specific factors operate differs between problem areas**. Learning about the particular kinds of settings in which radicalisation happens in one context may not necessarily be applicable to the particular kinds of settings in which it would happen in another.

There are no vulnerability 'profiles', though there are factors of vulnerability

Research does not reveal any distinctive 'vulnerability profile', which would allow the prediction of who is at risk of radicalisation without generating an unmanageable number of false positives. Some patterns of attributes or characteristics observed in the background of radicalised individuals may, however, be **markers indicative of the processes at work in AQIR**.

- *Age.* Age is a consistent marker. Though there are exceptions, AQIR and other problem areas concern mainly young people. For AQIR, the bracket is **roughly 15 to 35 years of age**. Adolescence and young adulthood are **periods of transitions,** which affect a person's likelihood of exposure to radicalising settings. When full-grown adults are involved, they seem to have undergone similar transitional experiences (for example, migration).

- *Moral and cognitive vulnerability.* Individual vulnerability to criminogenic (including radicalising) influence is described in the same terms across problem areas. No specific factors seem to distinguish moral and cognitive vulnerability to radicalisation from vulnerability to conversion to a new religious movement (NRM). *Cognitive vulnerability* manifests as an **inability to cope with stress or challenging situations**. *Moral vulnerability* is described as a weak commitment to conventional moral rules and values (**weak moral rule-guidance**), or as the undermining of a prior commitment to moral rules and values. There is a strong suggestion across problem areas that **commitment to a conventional moral framework renders people less susceptible, if not immune, to the influence of radicalising settings**. Conversely, **a weak commitment to a conventional moral framework renders them vulnerable** to that influence.

- *Personal preferences (self-selection).* Many radicalised individuals are described as having experienced a 'turning point' or 'event' that contributed to a **loss of human and/or social capital**, and in turn led to their moral and/or cognitive vulnerability to radicalisation. **The generic nature of these life events means that they are poor predictors of radicalisation.** They are more productively understood as experiences that shape people's preferences (their wants and desires), and lead them to spend time in particular settings (for example, places where they feel safe, where they can find companionship or moral support, where they can 'air grievances' to a sympathetic audience). **In a few cases, the settings people elect to spend time in will have radicalising features**. If exposure is repeated, and if people are sensitive to these features (in other words, vulnerable to moral change), radicalisation can occur.

- *Social selection.* The selection of settings based on preference and other personal factors (**self-selection**) occurs within the limits set by social selection. People are more likely to find themselves in certain kinds of places according to the (social, cultural, economic, residential)

categories to which they belong. If one of these kinds of places happens to contain a radicalising setting, then the people more likely to find themselves in these places will also be more likely to be exposed to radicalising influence. **Who is at risk of exposure (and who will be radicalised) is determined by the location of radicalising settings.** Processes of social selection can explain why radicalised individuals have diverse socio-demographic or socio-economic characteristics: their background will be, in part, determined by the characteristics of the radicalising settings found in the environment.

- **Membership of a social network containing one or more radicalised member**, or containing a member connected in some way to one or more radicalising settings, is one of the main factors linked to exposure to radicalising influence. That **the Internet does not appear to play a significant role in AQIR** might be surprising, given that it is the social networking medium par excellence. However, the fact that the technology presents obstacles to the formation of intimate bonds could explain this counter-intuitive finding. **Personal attachments to radicalising agents, be they peers, recruiters or moral authority figures, play a prominent role in AQIR**.

To understand better why certain kinds of people (rather than other kinds) become exposed to terrorism-promoting moral contexts and acquire a propensity for terrorism, **it is necessary to understand how the settings that promote terrorism come to be found in people's environment in the first place**. This is the problem of emergence.

Emergence is key, but poorly understood

Radicalising settings are characterised by:

- **socialising practices**, notably moral teachings, which support terrorist violence;

- a **lack of effective monitoring** of the behaviours that go on in the setting; and

- **opportunities for attachments to radicalising agents**, be they peers, recruiters, or moral authority figures.

These radicalising features are found in places ranging from **'neutral' settings** (for example, sports clubs) to so-called **radicalisation magnets** (for example, religious study groups). Neutral settings can expose individuals to radicalising influences in an incidental way: what attracts people to the setting in the first place are not its radicalising features, but some other aspect or activity.

Very little is known about why radicalising settings emerge in certain places at certain times, but the following factors are likely to influence that process:

- *Systemic factors.* Factors linked to the presence of radicalising settings in a given context are found at meso- and macro- levels of explanation, from the neighbourhood level to the global level. The literature points to the contribution of community-level factors, such as **low levels of collective efficacy and community cohesion**, in creating an environment favourable to the emergence of radicalising settings. Other factors include **residential segregation** and

intergenerational gaps, which contribute to the creation of spaces isolated from mainstream society (spaces where radicalising practices may not be challenged). The social movement literature further stresses the role of economic, social and political opportunity closure.

- *Media.* Media are a vector that **facilitate the introduction of new moral values and ideas into local contexts**.

- *Radicalising narratives*. Both AQIR studies and the literature on social and new religious movements stress the role of narratives in the dissemination and transmission of violence-supportive rules and values. **These narratives are characterised as transcendental, simplistic, categorical and action-orientated**, all characteristics that would appeal to a young audience. This has implications for the crafting of counter-radicalising narratives. Social movement scholarship suggests that the mobilising success of extremist narratives will remain modest as long as mainstream social values are broadly incompatible with their messages. It also suggests that successful narratives are those that tap into existing reservoirs of images and values.

Directions for research and prevention

Context matters

To design measures against specific problems, **context needs to be taken into account**. Community cohesion can, in one context, hamper radicalisation, and facilitate it in another. **The purpose of a scientific framework such as the one presented here is to direct attention to the features of the local context that are likely to matter, how they are likely to matter, and how they might be manipulated to change the outcome in the desired way**. Once interventions have been designed and implemented they can be evaluated, and the *evidence-base* about what works in preventing radicalisation can start to grow.

Anticipating the effects of prevention measures

The present framework can be used as a guide to assess the effectiveness of an intervention before it is implemented. **If it is not possible to identify clearly *how* (through which mechanism[s]) an intervention would affect the final outcome (prevent the radicalisation of individuals), that intervention is unlikely to succeed**. The first step in the design of any intervention must be to identify clearly what element of the radicalisation process is being targeted and how it is to be disrupted.

Moving beyond 'vulnerable individuals'

It is necessary to increase knowledge of all the levels of explanation, including exposure and emergence, rather than focus efforts on predicting and tackling individual vulnerability alone. The so-called 'franchise' model embodied by Al Qa'ida is, if anything, in the business of facilitating and

sustaining the widespread emergence of radicalising contexts. Yet radicalising settings are not found everywhere. **Some environments are more hospitable to the emergence of radicalising settings than others**. By and large, UK communities have proven resistant to the emergence of AQIR settings and to radicalisation generally. Understanding why is paramount.

To do so requires systematic research into the interconnected processes of individual vulnerability (to moral change and to selection), exposure to radicalising settings (through self- and social selection) and emergence of contexts favourable to radicalisation.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The *Prevent* strand of the Government's current counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST II) outlines the strategic objectives that must be met to address the threat from Al Qa'ida-influenced terrorism (so-called 'home-grown terrorism'). These objectives[1] — notably, "to support individuals who are vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists" (Objective 3) and "to increase the resilience of communities to violent extremism" (Objective 4) — can only be achieved if they are informed by an understanding of the process of radicalisation undergone by individuals who engage in AQ-influenced terrorism.

This report is the result of a project commissioned by the UK Home Office, Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). This project set out to assess and synthesise current knowledge on Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR) and explore whether knowledge in neighbouring problem areas could inform an understanding of the radicalisation processes that contribute to 'home-grown' terrorism. Ultimately, the purpose of this exercise is to provide the foundations of a knowledge-base on radicalisation, to support prevention strategies, and to set out priorities for a systematic research agenda.

1.2 Rationale

To prevent a problem from occurring is to successfully remove the causes of the problem, or to disrupt the causal processes involved. This is why questions of causation and explanation are central to the design of any prevention strategy. Without a systematic understanding of how people come to be radicalised, effective counter-radicalisation programmes cannot be developed. To 'do' in the absence of knowledge is to run the risk of wasting resources at best and compounding the problem at worst. Any intervention must be informed by the best scientific knowledge available.

One way to establish what constitutes 'best scientific knowledge' in a problem area is to carry out a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA). An REA is a user-driven exercise in evidence evaluation and synthesis. Traditionally, REAs are concerned with 'what works' types of questions, but they can also be used to address non-impact questions, such as questions about causes (Butler *et al.* 2005). This REA assesses and synthesises current scientific knowledge on the causes of AQIR.

1.3 Problem

The study of the causes of radicalisation in particular, and of the causes of terrorism in general, is in its infancy. A number of factors contribute to the scientific immaturity of the field, among them: the low volume of incidents and the relatively small number of individuals implicated, notably in the

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[1] These objectives relate to the *Prevent* Strategy published in 2007.

West; the security issues involved in accessing non-open source data; the lack of integration between disciplines; and the imprecise boundaries of the problem area.

Key terms of reference lack conventional definitions and terminology is often used interchangeably. Radicalisation is weakly conceptualised and the relationship between radicalisation and acts of terrorism poorly articulated. To date, research has produced a number of empirical generalisations based on observations — most often having to do with the background characteristics of the individuals involved and their life histories — but few causal processes linking plausible causes and their outcome have been put forward. This is understandable, given that few of the studies identified in this REA are guided by an explicit theoretical framework, with the notable exception of Quintan Wiktorowicz's (2004; 2005), and to an extent Jon Olsen's (2009). No model has yet been put forward that integrates individual, situational and ecological or systemic levels of explanation, by identifying the *specific mechanisms* through which these levels interact to produce radicalisation.

In this context, radicalisation research is a poor candidate for an REA, the purpose of which is to identify and synthesise the findings of high quality studies. Yet the need for a knowledge-base to inform policy remains. One way to address this problem is to capitalise on knowledge created in more easily researched areas, such as the general study of crime, where the same basic processes are likely to operate.

Given weak evidence, a theory-driven approach is needed, to tell apart the useful findings from the meaningless ones.

1.4 Approach

The organisation of knowledge is central to science. One of the most difficult tasks in social science is to tell apart meaningful from meaningless findings. Criminologists have long struggled with this problem. Criminological research has identified dozens, if not hundreds, of factors that correlate with crime. This has led experts and policy-makers alike to question whether 'anything or everything' matters in the explanation of crime and, by extension, in its prevention.

The experience of criminology demonstrates that the mere accumulation of empirical observations, however sophisticated the research design, does not necessarily lead to a strong *understanding* of the problem, or to the ability to intervene effectively. Bluntly, a knowledge-base capable of supporting policy is made up of more than just facts and figures.

The reason for this is that empirical findings do not 'speak for themselves'. Causes have to be conjectured before they can be investigated empirically, because most of the mechanisms that make up causal processes cannot be observed directly. For example, one cannot 'see' gravity, only its effects. The existence of gravity has to be conjectured from the observation of its effects. It is the same for mechanisms involved in the production of human behaviour, such as socialisation or perception.

These conjectures (explanations based on mechanisms) are central to any scientific knowledge-base. They identify ways in which change can be effected. Interventions are then built on the back of these proposals. Their effectiveness can be evaluated, providing empirical support (or the lack thereof) for the theories on which they are based.

Crucially for the purpose of prevention, any knowledge-base must include a framework capable of distinguishing between:

- factors (indicators) that can help determine who is at risk (*the problem of prediction*); and

- factors that are (directly or indirectly) causally relevant; that is, which have a causal influence on the outcome (*the problem of causation*).

Factors that predict are not necessarily (in fact, they rarely are) causes. Only a limited number of predictors are causes and can therefore inform prevention strategies. A classic example, which illustrates the difference between prediction and causation, is that of the barometer. A barometer can predict changes in the weather, but it does not cause these changes. Another example might be a person who regularly attends Chelsea football matches, regularly wears a Chelsea shirt, and subscribes to Chelsea TV. These indicators are likely to predict that this person supports Chelsea with a high degree of accuracy. However, none of these factors can explain *why* they support Chelsea or, more importantly, what to do to change their allegiance to another team.

To be able to predict who is at risk of being radicalised, it would be necessary to identify a combination of factors that only (or almost only) identify those who are at risk. Even if all known radicalised individuals were male and unemployed, gender and employment status would not constitute good predictors, because only a very small proportion of unemployed males are radicalised.

In the absence of reliable indicators, prediction will hinder more than help prevention efforts. When the purpose is to devise preventative measures, especially in empirically-weak research fields, efforts should concentrate on telling apart causes from mere statistical associations.

To carry out this task, the present REA goes beyond a summary of empirical findings to adopt a theory-driven approach. The advantage of using a theoretical framework to make sense of 'atomised' findings has been recognised, even in empirically-rich areas such as youth gang studies (Thornberry *et al.,* 2003:p77; Howell and Egley, 2005).

Here, a well-developed criminological framework known as Situational Action Theory (SAT) is used to organise findings from the AQIR literature and from neighbouring problem areas, and identify plausible causal processes.

1.5 Framework

SAT is a unified theory of the causes of crime. It builds upon insights from conventional criminology and draws upon social and behavioural sciences and research more generally to explain how (through which specific mechanisms) individual and environmental factors interact in the production of acts of crime.

In contrast with many other explanatory frameworks in terrorism studies, SAT is concerned primarily with questions about *how*, rather than questions about *why*[2]. In other words, it is concerned with causes and causal processes of action, rather than with the reasons people have (or say they have) for their actions. That is not to say that motivation for action is regarded as irrelevant; the emphasis is on explaining how motivation arises, rather than focusing on what, specifically, that motivation might be. This approach provides an objective framework within which to study the subjective motives of individuals.

SAT lays out a clear definition of the object of the theory, crime, as *the act of breaking a moral rule written in law*. What SAT aims to explain, then, is how people come to break rules that set out what is right or wrong in a particular circumstance, when they know it is illegal to do so. In other words, SAT seeks to explain how, when suitably motivated, people come to perceive crime as a possible action alternative (something they could possibly do), and how they come to choose to do it.

SAT takes action (the act of terrorism) as a starting point, because it is necessary to have an idea of what the direct causes of an act are before the indirect causes (meso-, macro- and developmental processes; that is, 'the causes of the causes') can be worked out. In other words, an understanding of the immediate causes of terrorist acts is needed, in order to establish what (less immediate) role radicalisation plays in the explanation of terrorist acts. It is necessary to know where in the causal chain radicalisation occurs, before radicalisation processes can be explained. Hence, a theory of action such as SAT is an appropriate framework for the study of radicalisation.

Using SAT can integrate knowledge from multiple problem areas, including AQIR.

1.6 Shared problem space

While other social science frameworks may, for example, conceive of individuals as economic decision-makers, SAT conceives of individuals as primarily rule-guided. In other words, it sees individuals as moral agents. By defining crime as moral rule-breaking, SAT sets itself out as a special case within a general theory of moral action. As such, SAT is an ideal framework within which to organise knowledge from multiple problem areas, from AQIR to new religious movements, youth gangs, and violent radical activism.

While actions carried out in each of these domains have different outcomes and consequences, it does not follow that the basic processes involved must be different. To say that, for example, developmental processes in crime and terrorism cannot be explained in the same way because crime and terrorism have different consequences is to commit a kind of category error in reverse. Terrorism is a crime and, therefore, can be explained as moral action. Other problem areas identified by the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) are concerned with explaining how people

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[2] For a full discussion of the relative merits of SAT and other theoretical frameworks concerned with explaining terrorism and radicalisation, see Bouhana and Wikström (2008).

adopt, follow and/or breach rules of conduct, and how they do so within a group setting. Basic processes in all the problem areas, including AQIR, should be explained within the same framework.

1.7 Objectives

Determining causation is a long, arduous and incremental task. This project was intended to provide a general foundation upon which to build a systematic and coherent research agenda for the prevention of radicalisation, as well as to determine how far the available evidence supports current prevention strategies.

Key objectives are:

- To identify, assess and synthesise current empirical research on AQIR and neighbouring problem areas available in the public domain.

- To turn fragmented and often anecdotal findings into a useful knowledge-base by way of theory-guided analysis, selecting and organising findings according to the evidence they provide for plausible causal mechanisms.

- To take steps to move an understanding of AQIR from description to explanation by proposing key causal processes (mechanisms).

- To offer a framework against which current and future radicalisation prevention strategies can be assessed. Any intervention should be clear about the causal processes it is targeting. If an intervention is not aimed at disrupting a plausible cause, there is little ground to expect success.

- To prioritise avenues within a systematic research agenda.

This report is not intended to summarise everything that is known about AQIR, but to establish *what matters* about what is known about AQIR.

1.8 Report structure

First, the methodology used in this REA is briefly summarised (Chapter 2). SAT is then outlined and categories of causal mechanisms thought to be central to the explanation of AQIR are identified (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 present theory-guided syntheses of findings from the REA and the targeted search of the literature in neighbouring problem areas, respectively. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 6.

Early on in the project, imprecision and confusion over terminology were identified as key problems limiting the expansion of the knowledge-base on radicalisation. To tackle this issue, a glossary of technical and scientific terms is included. Readers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with these definitions before proceeding to the next chapter.

GLOSSARY

Crime　　　　　A crime is the act of breaking a **moral rule** written in law.

Terrorism　　　Terrorism is a **crime** carried out as a method of creating fear and intimidation with the aim of reaching political or social objectives.

Radicalisation　Radicalisation is the process by which an individual acquires the propensity to engage in acts of **terrorism**.

Propensity　　　Propensity refers to the individual factors that affect a person's tendency to perceive a particular act as a plausible action alternative (something that they could see themselves doing) in a particular **setting**, and to choose to carry it out. Propensity can be action-specific. For example, **terrorism** propensity refers to the tendency to perceive terrorism as an action alternative and to choose to carry it out.

Development　　Development refers to a lasting change. Individual development characterises itself by a lasting change in the dispositions that influence how a person 'perceives and deals' with the world around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:p3). This distinguishes development from situational (temporary) changes in disposition (for example, a temporary change in the ability to exercise self-control due to the consumption of alcohol).

Morality　　　　A person's morality is made up of the *moral rules* and related *moral emotions* (for example, shame, guilt) they have internalised (more or less strongly) and through which they evaluate the events they encounter in the world. Particular moral rules are relevant for particular kinds of actions in particular kinds of circumstances; therefore, *action-relevant* moral rules can explain a particular kind of action.

Moral rule　　　A moral rule is a rule that stipulates what is right or wrong in a particular circumstance.

Moral context　The moral context is made up of the action-relevant **moral rules** (rules that promote or prohibit particular actions) and the enforcement of these rules (deterrence mechanisms) that occur in a particular **setting**. For example, the moral context of a setting is conducive to violence if the setting's rules promote violence, or if the rules prohibiting violence are weakly enforced.

Motivation　　　Motivation is defined as goal-directed attention (for example, wanting an ice-cream). Motivation is a situational process. It arises from the interaction between a person and a **setting**. Motivation is *part of* the process that moves people to act. It influences the direction in which a person may act, but not *whether* that person will act. The two main classes of motivation relevant to criminal and terrorist action are *temptations* (opportunity to satisfy wants, needs or commitments) and *provocations* (friction experienced as a result of external interference, resulting in

negative emotions, such as anger or frustration).

Preference	A preference is a (more or less strongly-held) want, desire or inclination formed over a person's life (as a result of their life experience). If **motivation** is the outcome of a situational process, then preference is the outcome of a developmental process.
Setting	A setting is a part of the environment to which an individual is directly exposed and reacts. It is made up of the configuration of objects, persons and events accessible through the person's senses. This includes any media present in the setting. A setting is therefore more than just 'place'.
Activity field	An activity field is the configuration of **settings** in which people develop and act, with reference to any given life period (for example, day, month, year).
Exposure	**Settings** vary in the degree to which their features promote particular acts or particular socialisation practices. Exposure is when a person accesses these features through their senses. *Criminogenic* exposure is when the features being accessed promote acts of **crime,** for example, acts of **terrorism** or crime-supportive socialisation, for example, **radicalising** practices.
Situation	A situation can be defined as the perception of action alternatives (what action a person would consider doing) and the associated process of choice (whether they decide to do it or not), which occurs when a particular person interacts with a particular **setting** at a particular time.
Selection	Selection is the process through which particular kinds of people end up in particular kinds of **settings**. Selection can result from individual factors and processes of selection (*self-selection*) and from environmental factors and processes of selection (*social selection*). For example, people who like loud, crowded and exciting environments are more likely to elect to spend time in a nightclub than those who don't (self-selection), and people of a given socio-economic background are more likely to live in some neighbourhoods rather than others (social selection).
Agency	A person's agency is their capacity to make things happen intentionally. Agency is context-dependent; it varies between **settings** (in other words, there are times and places in which a person will have more 'power' to make things happen than others, given who they are). Agency is primarily fuelled by a person's *human capital* and *social capital*.
Human capital	A person's human capital (their personal resources) is made up of the value of their personal experience, knowledge and skills, relative to the particular context they are in. For example, an individual can find that their experience and training is of no help in their new job in a new country, in which case their ability to obtain what they want will be diminished.

Social capital	A person's social capital (their social resources) is made up of the social networks and institutions upon which they can draw for help in a particular context.
Community	A community is made up of the social (networks, activities, and routines) and built (physical arrangement of the space) environment of a particular locality.
Mechanism	A mechanism is a causal process that links a **cause** to its effect. It is what explains how a cause produces the effect.
Cause	A cause is something (a factor) that initiates a causal process that produces an effect. A *causally-relevant factor* is a factor that affects (initiates or prevents) a particular causal process. A factor is causally-relevant if it can be manipulated in a way that affects the outcome of interest (in other words, if a change in the factor will lead to a change in the outcome).
Explanation	To explain is to provide an account of *how* (through which **mechanism**) a **cause** brings about an effect (for example, a family socialises a child through the following mechanisms: moral teaching, behaviour monitoring, caring and nurturing, all enacted by the child's parents).
Prediction	To predict is to state the outcome in advance. Prediction should not be confused with **causation** or **explanation**. Prediction only tells what will happen, not what causes it to happen, or how (by which process) it happens. Factors that predict are not necessarily the factors that cause an outcome.
Prevention	To prevent something is to stop something from happening that otherwise would have happened. Prevention requires either removal of the cause(s) of the effect, or disruption of the causal process (**mechanisms**) that produce the effect.
Correlation	A correlation is the statistical measure of the relationship (association) between two variables. Correlation can be indicative of, but cannot demonstrate, a **causal** relationship.
Correlate	A correlate is a factor that is associated with an outcome. For example, if a person's **morality** and **crime** involvement are correlated (have a statistical association), then morality is a correlate (a predictor) of crime involvement. Most correlates are not causes but only **markers** or **symptoms**.
Marker	A marker is a factor that is **correlated** with a (true) **cause** of an outcome. For example, a barometer's reading is correlated with certain causes of weather conditions, but it is not a cause of the weather. The barometer's reading is a marker of conditions causing the weather.
Symptom	A symptom is a factor that **correlates** with the outcome of a **causal** process. For example, spots are a symptom of measles, and therefore correlated with, but not causative of, measles.

Attribute	An attribute is a label applied to a person or a thing. For example, socio-demographic characteristics are attributes of persons. Attributes cannot be causes (they do not have **causal** power), but they can be **markers**. For example, age can be a marker for biological processes, which can themselves be causal factors in some actions; but it is incorrect to say that age is the *cause* of the behaviour.

2. Methodology

Rapid evidence assessments (REAs) are user-driven and generally concerned with 'what works' types of question. However, REAs can also address non-impact questions, such as questions about causes (Butler *et al.*, 2005). Non-impact REAs present unique analytical and methodological difficulties, especially in such a young field of study as research into Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR). This chapter describes the analytical stance and search methodology chosen to address these difficulties. The limitations of this exercise are also discussed.

2.1 Problem space

REAs, like systematic reviews, are used to identify the 'best evidence' available to support decision-making policy and practice. This requires that the research field of interest has reached some level of scientific maturity.

The immaturity of research into terrorism and AQIR is acknowledged by subject matter experts (Silke, 2001; Horgan, 2005a), yet the need to support decision-making remains. One way to fill the knowledge gap is to gather evidence from neighbouring problem areas (NPAs). The specification for this REA identified *youth gangs*, *new religious movements (cults)*, and *violent radical activism* (narrowly understood as forms of political violence other than Al Qa'ida-inspired) as fields that share conceptual similarities with AQIR. Knowledge gathered from these areas may add to an understanding of radicalisation.

2.2 Analytical framework

To synthesise a weak empirical-base across different problem areas with heterogeneous levels of analysis, a robust analytical framework is required.

This REA adopts a theory-driven approach guided by Situational Action Theory (SAT). Theories are explanatory frameworks that can be used to make sense of disjointed and sometimes contradictory findings. SAT was used to inform not only the evidence synthesis, but also the formulation of the research questions, the selection of search terms and the design of the quality assessment procedure. SAT is presented in more depth in Chapter 3.

2.3 Research phases

The research was carried out in successive phases (Figure 1). *Phase 1* was a rapid assessment of research on AQIR (hereafter, the 'Main REA'). A targeted literature review of the NPAs identified in the project specification was conducted in *Phase 2*. In *Phase 3*, findings were synthesised using SAT, laying out the foundations of a scientific knowledge-base for the prevention of radicalisation.

Figure 1 Project phases
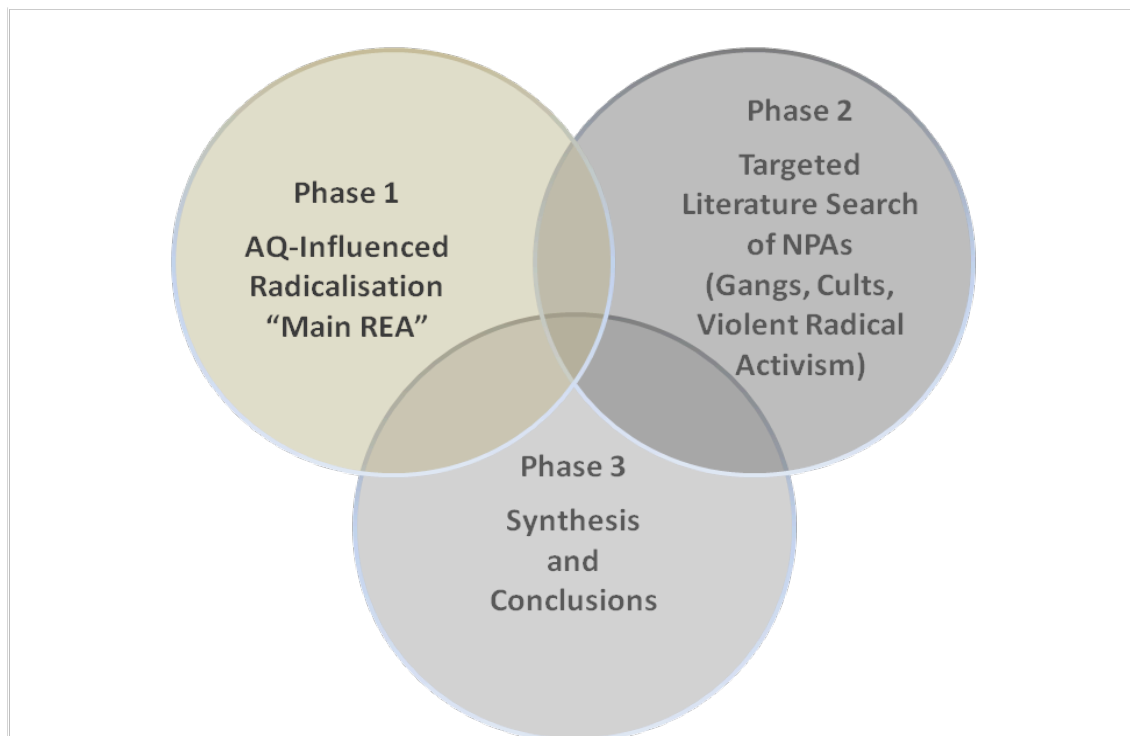
2.4 Research questions

Given the scientific immaturity of the main field of study, the research question guiding the Main REA was kept deliberately broad.

The over-arching study question is:

> Q1. *What is known about the factors, mechanisms and processes involved in AQIR?*

The question could be unpacked as follows:

> Q1a. *How can those at risk (or not at risk) of becoming radicalised be identified? (Prediction)*

> Q1b. *How can the fact that some people become radicalised (or do not become radicalised) be explained? (Explanation)*

> Q1c. *How can individuals be prevented from becoming radicalised? (Intervention)*

> Q1d. *How common is it for individuals of a given population to become radicalised? (Outcome)*

The scoping search did not turn up a single scientific evaluation of a counter-radicalisation programme or initiative, or a study of radicalisation prevalence. Given that the project's main aim was to inform prevention policies, which require an understanding of causal processes, the search strategy focused on Q1a and Q1b. In the authors' experience, prediction and explanation are often confused with each other. However, some predictors (that is, risk factors) will turn out to be markers and will suggest the presence of causal processes. In other words, a theory-guided analysis of alleged predictive factors can allow the conjecture of causal mechanisms.

A second research question, which can be broken into a similar subset of questions, drove the targeted search of the NPAs.

> Q2. *What is known about the factors, mechanisms and processes involved in individual engagement in youth gangs, new religious movements, and violent radical activism, which could help us understand the causes of AQIR?*

2.5 Definitions

The issue of terminology in the field of terrorism studies in general, and radicalisation in particular, is a contested one (Horgan, 2009). Most of the literature included in this REA suffers from a lack of definition of the research question (what it is that the researchers are trying to explain). Yet, without a clear definition of the object of the study, understanding can only be impaired.

In the absence of a consensual definition of radicalisation, AQIR is defined as *the process through which individuals come to see acts of (Al Qa'ida-influenced) terrorism as a viable action alternative.* In other words, radicalisation is defined as the process by which people acquire a propensity for terrorism — the moral values and emotions that support terrorism.

The qualifier 'Al Qa'ida-influenced' is included in the definition of radicalisation for methodological reasons, to restrict the scope of the literature search, as per the project specifications set out by the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). It is not included because it is expected that AQIR will result from unique kinds of processes.

Because *radicalisation* and *participation in acts of terrorist violence* or *participation in a terrorist group* or *recruitment into a terrorist organisation* aren't synonymous (a person can be radicalised and never commit an act of terrorism, or join a terrorist organisation, or be recruited into one)[3] care was taken, as much as possible given the literature's diverse terminology and imprecise problem boundaries, not to equate radicalisation with participation in terrorism or terrorist groups—although group participation can, of course, contribute to the radicalisation process. The purpose of this project is to analyse and synthesise research on the causes of radicalisation, not on the causes of terrorism or on the causes of participation in terrorist groups.

A glossary of technical and scientific terms used in the report can be found on page 6.

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[3] A person can be involved in an act of terrorism without being radicalised at all; for example, if they have been coerced into participating.

2.6 Phase 1: Main REA

The project was carried out between February and June 2010. The literature search for the Main REA was conducted in March 2010.

2.6.1 Search terms

Because of weak conceptual development in the problem area, it was decided that the Main REA should take an inclusive approach, privileging sensitivity over specificity. For a description of the search term selection strategy, see Appendix B.

2.6.2 Databases

The Main REA search was conducted across several academic and non-academic databases. See Appendix C for a complete list.

2.6.3 Search limits

To keep the search manageable, the following limits were applied:

- **Language**: Only documents in English and French were returned.
- **Time**: A publishing date cut-off was set at 1999 (inclusive).
- **Documents**: Where the database interface allowed, results were limited to full articles, research briefs, and book reviews.

2.6.4 Search hits

Details of search hits per database before and after the first screening procedure can be found in Appendix D.

2.6.5 Screening strategy

The raw search returned **16,582** records (including duplicates), which were downloaded into EndNote. The records were put through an iterative screening process (see Figure 2). After the first screening, **414** documents that made some mention of empirical research into AQIR remained; **55** of these documents satisfied the minimum criterion by using primary data and were considered for final inclusion.

Full details of the records screening procedure are available in Appendix E.

Figure 2 Iterative screening process (Main REA)

Raw Hits	1st Screening	2nd Screening	Final Inclusion
16,582 documents identified	414 documents on AQIR retained	55 'empirical' studies retained	15 studies retained after QA
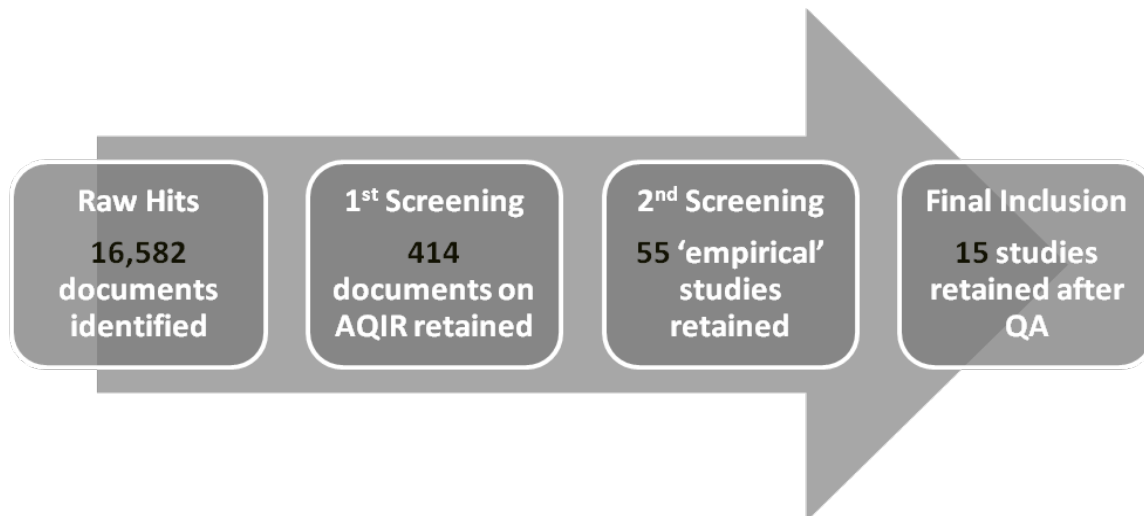
2.6.6 Quality assessment

Like in a systematic review, the Main REA process requires that studies be assessed for the scientific quality of their research design, before being considered for final inclusion.

At the outset, two main issues were identified:

- Because of the broadness of the REA question, the studies under consideration for final inclusion were spread across such a span of aims and methodologies that existing tools could not be used to score all of them.

- Given the scientific immaturity of the field, a detailed quality appraisal would result in the exclusion of the totality of the studies. This outcome might be methodologically sound, but would not provide the REA users with any sort of guidance.

To address these issues, a custom quality assessment procedure had to be designed. The cut-off point for inclusion following methodological appraisal had to be placed much lower than would otherwise be acceptable in a systematic review.

The low quality of the research-base, which is the basis of this REA, must be kept in mind. *The AQIR evidence-base is scientifically weak*.

A full description of the quality assessment procedure and its rationale can be found in Appendix F.

Following the quality assessment, **15** studies were retained for final inclusion (see Appendix A).

2.7 Phase 2: Targeted search of neighbouring problem areas

Once the findings from the 15 studies had been analysed and synthesised, Phase 2 of the study was undertaken: mining the NPAs identified by the REA users. Given the constraints, it was not possible to conduct full, separate REAs for each NPA. Instead, the areas were mined in one of two ways: targeted literature searches; and recommendations from subject matter experts (SMEs).

An overview of the targeted search process is available in Appendix G.

2.8 Phase 3: Analytical synthesis

To tackle the challenges identified so far, namely a weak evidence-base in AQIR, and conceptual and terminological confusion within and between problem areas, the analytical synthesis of findings was guided by a robust theoretical framework, SAT. SAT is described in the next chapter, while the results of the analytical synthesis are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, and summed up in Chapter 6.

2.9 Limitations

This study suffers from the limitations common to REA methodologies, among them:

- *Language bias*: A number of documents were identified that may have been relevant to the Main REA questions, but were not written in a language spoken by the reviewers. A list of these documents was communicated to the REA users. A greater number of foreign studies will have undoubtedly been missed.
- *Source bias*: Time was also a limiting factor. It led to heavy reliance on electronic resources. It was not possible to search key journals by hand. Some documents, such as foreign or out-of-print books, could not be obtained during the search period.
- *Publication bias*: The Internet has facilitated access to what used to be considered 'grey' literature (for example, doctoral theses), but the fact remains that unpublished studies are likely to have escaped the researchers' notice. During the search process, a handful of restricted documents were found. A list was communicated to the REA users.
- *Timeline*: Any document not available for searching by early March 2010 will not have been considered. The search and selection criteria has been made as clear as possible, so that the REA could be easily updated.

3. Situational Action Theory

Aside from identifying relevant and good quality research, one of the main challenges of a non-impact Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) is to organise disparate empirical findings in a way that advances an understanding of the problem and its causes. Without a theoretical framework, an REA into the problem of 'radicalisation' runs the risk of providing a fragmented list of factors (often inadequately referred to as 'risk factors'), which would do little to further the understanding of the causes of radicalisation, and of its prevention. In the absence of guidance, it is not possible to tell which factors are important, which aren't, and how these factors are related to each other.

This REA is guided by a framework known as *Situational Action Theory* (SAT), which is used to organize insights from empirical research on radicalisation and neighbouring problems areas (NPAs). In this chapter, the rationale for employing SAT is briefly outlined, before the theory is presented in more detail. A SAT-guided framework for organising and discriminating among findings on radicalisation and NPAs is described.

3.1 Why use Situational Action Theory?

There is no fundamental difference in explaining why a person comes to shoplift, commit a bank robbery, engage in insider-trading, or blow up an airplane. The basic causal processes involved are the same, although their input may differ. Like other types of crime, acts of terrorism are moral actions. They are actions guided by rules about what is the right or wrong thing to do and should be analysed as such (Bouhana and Wikström, 2008).

As previously stated, terrorism is a notoriously difficult area to study. This is reflected in the limited scope and scientific weakness of much of the research conducted to date (Silke, 2001; Horgan, 2005a). However, the fact that acts of terrorism are likely to share the same basic explanatory processes as other types of moral action (such as acts of crime) means that it is possible to draw upon general insights from the study of moral actions, including crime, to advance the understanding of terrorism in general and radicalisation in particular.

SAT has been developed to unify key theoretical and empirical insights from criminology and social and behavioural sciences more generally, in order to explain moral action[4] (see Wikström, 2005; 2006; 2010a; 2010b; Wikström and Butterworth, 2006).[5] Using SAT as an analytical framework

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[4] In SAT, the adjective 'moral' is used in a descriptive, not a normative, sense. A moral rule is simply a rule that sets out what is right or what is wrong. As a theory of crime, SAT tries to explain why people knowingly break moral rules formalised in law; it does not seek to explain whether the rules being broken are legitimate or morally justified (that is, whether the rules being broken are or should be *norms*). However, people may very well break a moral rule *because* they do not find it legitimate (that is, because there is a *lack of correspondence* between the rule and their own morality).

[5] An in-depth discussion of SAT, including the operationalisation of its key concepts, is far beyond the scope of this report. For a detailed overview of SAT and the findings of the Economic and Social Research Council-funded longitudinal study set up to test the framework, visit the website of the Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study (PADS+) at: http://www.pads.co.uk. The study began in 2002 and is based at

allows the researchers to capitalise on knowledge from areas that benefit from greater theoretical and empirical development than terrorism and radicalisation studies.

The point has already been made that a robust analytical foundation is all the more needed in an area where scientific research is in its infancy. Not all findings are equal. Among the array of individual and environmental factors linked to radicalisation, most will be *markers* or *symptoms* rather than *causes*, therefore, irrelevant to the prevention effort. As stated at the outset (see Section 1.4), to prevent is to intervene successfully upon the factors and processes that have causal power in relation to the outcome (here, radicalisation). Interventions targeting markers or symptoms of radicalisation are meaningless since they cannot have any influence on radicalisation.

A framework is needed, which allows for the separation between the factors and processes likely to have causal efficacy and those likely to be causally irrelevant.

Using SAT allows the separation of the factors that are likely to be causes of radicalisation from those that are not.

3.2 Situational Action Theory: A brief overview

SAT aims to explain *moral actions*—actions that are guided by what is right or wrong; in other words, actions guided by rules.

To understand what individual and environmental factors are causally relevant in the explanation of a moral action (such as an act of terrorism), it is necessary to understand what it is that *moves* people to act in one way or another. If what moves people to carry out a particular kind of act cannot be properly understood, it is impossible to judge what personal and environmental factors are (directly and indirectly) causally relevant in that process. (And prevention efforts must do without guidance.)

According to SAT, people's moral actions (*MAs*), such as acts of terrorism, are the outcome of a perception-choice process ($\rightarrow$) initiated by the interaction (x) between their (action-relevant) propensity (*P*) and (action-relevant) exposure (*E*):

$$P \ x \ E \rightarrow MA$$

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the University of Cambridge. More than 700 young people and their families have taken part, as have more than 20 educational institutions in Peterborough.

People are moved to act by the action alternatives they perceive (the things they would consider doing), and the choices they make (rationally or habitually)[6], in relation to their motivations (goal-directed attention). For example, most people who dislike a government policy are unlikely to see an act of terrorism as an action alternative; they would not even consider it. Of those who do see terrorism as an action alternative, not all will choose to carry out such an act. The kinds of action alternative a person **perceives (their moral perception)** and the **(moral) choices** that they make on that basis depend on the interaction between their (action-relevant; here, terrorism) **propensity** (their relevant characteristics and experiences) and their (action-relevant) **exposure** to the environment (the moral context of the places in which they find themselves). This is, in brief, the *model* of SAT (Figure 3; see further Bouhana and Wikström, 2008; Wikström, 2010 for a discussion of the situational model applied to terrorism).

Figure 3 Model of Situational Action Theory
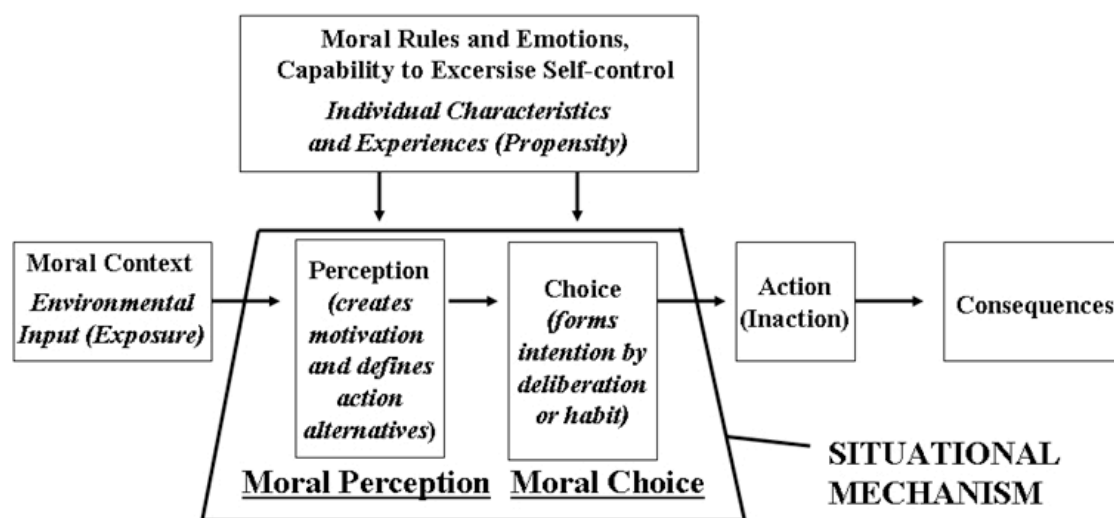
Source: Wikström, 2006.

If acts of crime, such as acts of terrorism, result from the interaction between a person's propensity to commit acts of terrorism and the criminogenic features of their environment, then to explain (and prevent) acts of terrorism, it is necessary to understand *how* some people come to acquire a propensity for terrorism. In other words, the process of *individual development*, which results in the acquisition of a terrorism propensity, must be understood.

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[6] Moral habits form in response to repeated exposure to particular settings and circumstances and are activated when the same (or similar) kinds of settings and circumstances are encountered, while rational deliberation (moral judgements) tends to occur when a person takes part in unfamiliar settings or circumstances, or encounters conflicting rule-guidance (see further Wikström, 2010).

3.2.1 Propensity: Morality and self-control

A person's propensity — their tendency to see and to choose a particular action as a viable action alternative — is largely the product of their action-relevant *morality* (and associated moral emotions) and their *capability to exercise self-control*.

An individual's morality (rules and emotions) is the basis of their propensity. The ability to exercise self-control only comes into play when a person is encouraged by the moral context of a setting to act contrary to their own morality (for example, when they are under 'peer pressure'). When people act in line with their own morality, their ability to exercise self-control is irrelevant to their actions. If there is no conflict, there is nothing to control. In that case, their actions are only influenced by their morality, not by their ability to exercise self-control (see further Wikström and Treiber, 2007; Wikström, 2010).

3.2.2 Exposure: Settings and activity fields

Individuals act and develop in *settings*. A setting is defined as the part of the environment (people, objects and events) that a person can experience through their senses at any given time. This includes any media present (such as the Internet).

In the analysis of action, the concept of *exposure* refers to the action-relevant features of a setting, which include the action-relevant opportunities and frictions the person encounters and their action-relevant moral context (the relevant moral rules and their level of enforcement).

The configuration of the settings a person is exposed to during a specific period (for example, a day, a month or a year) makes up that person's *activity field* (Wikström *et al.*, 2010). The activity field determines the kind of environmental influences an individual will experience during a specific period. These influences play a part, in the short term, in the actions the individual takes, and, in the longer term, in the development of their propensity for particular actions (such as engaging in terrorism).

People's activity fields vary and change over time and space. *The understanding of the causes of these variations and changes is central to the explanation of why people develop particular propensities* (such as propensity that promotes and supports acts of terrorism) and why they engage in particular actions (such as acts of terrorism).

3.2.3 Individual development and change

Bronfenbrenner (1979,p:3) defines individual development as "a lasting change in the way a person perceives and deals with his environment". This definition fits quite well with SAT, where *propensity change* is defined as *a lasting change in a person's perception of action alternatives and choices*— such as a change that leads a person to see acts of terrorism as a viable action alternative, when it wasn't before. These changes are dependent on changes in a person's *activity field*, such as changes in their exposure to moral contexts promoting acts of terrorism. Such changes have the potential to affect the development of that person's (action-relevant) morality.

Changes in a person's activity field are largely a consequence of processes of *self-* and *social selection*. Self-selection is the process by which a person is exposed to particular settings as a result of choices they have made based on their preferences (their wants and desires). Social selection refers to processes that influence a person's exposure to particular settings, and over which they have no (or little) real control. A typical example of a social selection process is segregation. Self-selection occurs within the limits set out by processes of social selection.

To be radicalised is to acquire moral rules that support
and encourage acts of terrorism.

3.2.4 Individual vulnerability

People vary in their level of *vulnerability* to particular kinds of exposure. An individual's vulnerability depends on the personal characteristics and experiences that make them susceptible to (here, terrorism-promoting) moral influence from the settings in which they take part.

People who start out with a *weak conventional morality*; who already hold, or have developed, strong social bonds (for example, through kinship or friendship) to unconventional sources of moral teachings; or who have experienced life events that undermine their current morality (for example, that undermine their existing attachments to sources of conventional moral education), are likely to be more vulnerable to unconventional moral influence than others.

3.2.5 Causes of the causes

While SAT regards propensity and exposure as **direct causes** of action (the interaction of factors that initiates the perception-choice process leading up to action), the social and developmental factors that influence a person's propensity and exposure are regarded as **'the causes of the causes' of action**.

The distinction between 'causes' and 'causes of the causes' is crucial, not only in terms of developing proper explanations, but also with regard to devising adequate prevention strategies and policies.

Figure 4 From radicalisation to terrorist action

"CAUSES OF THE CAUSES"   "CAUSES"   "OUTCOME"

Moral Development and Change → Propensity → Action

↕   ↕   ↕

Radicalisation   *Terrorism propensity*   *Act of terrorism*

(Process by which people acquire moral rules and emotions supporting acts of terrorism)

(Moral rules and emotions supporting acts of terrorism)
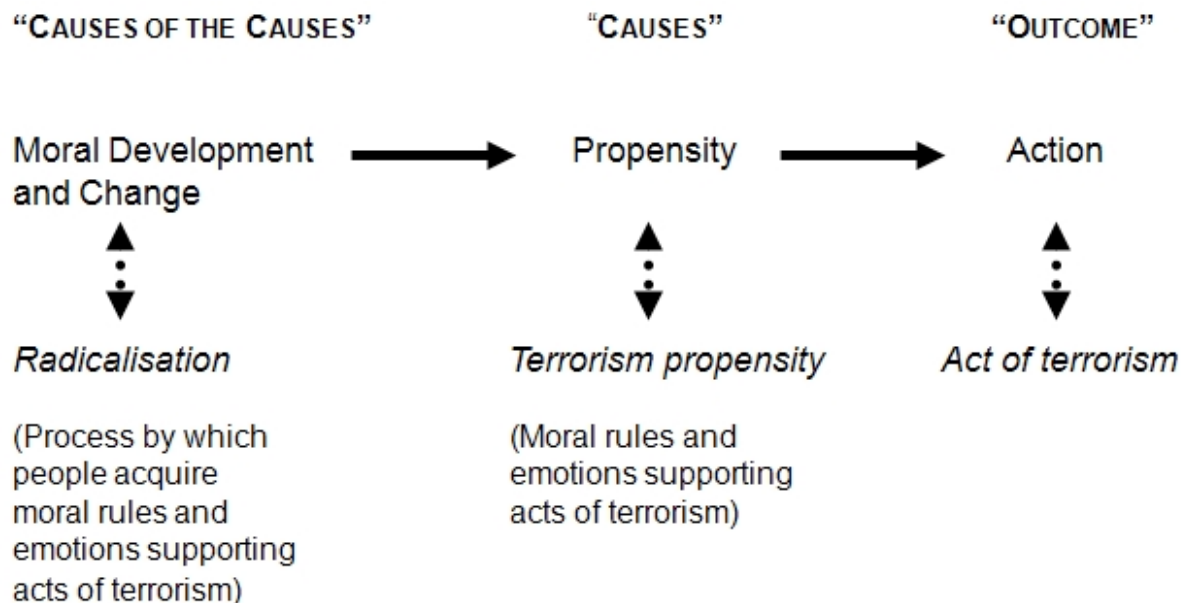
3.3 Analysing radicalisation: Emergence, exposure and vulnerability

When individual development and change result in the acquisition of a terrorism propensity, this process is called *radicalisation* (Figure 4)*.* Radicalisation is, therefore, defined as *the process by which a person comes to see acts of terrorism as a viable action alternative*.[7]

To be radicalised is thus to acquire moral rules (and their associated emotions) that support and encourage acts of terrorism. To explain radicalisation is to explain how people come to acquire moral rules that make them see acts of terrorism as a viable action alternative.

As outlined above, SAT proposes that people develop (acquire their propensities) and act in *settings*. Exposure to settings is thus crucial for the understanding of how people develop a propensity to engage in acts of terrorism. For a person to become radicalised:

• there must exist settings that promote radicalisation (*radicalising settings*);

• they have to be exposed to such settings; and

• they have to be vulnerable to the radicalising features of these settings (the *radicalising moral context*).

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[7] Conceptually speaking, there is no need to include concepts like 'extremist' or 'Al Qa'ida-influenced' in the definition of radicalisation. Qualifiers are unnecessary and likely to contribute to analytic confusion. However, the project specification for this REA stipulated that evidence be restricted to the 'Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR) research space, so the qualifier is used for methodological purposes.

When analysing radicalisation there are, therefore, at least three key problems that need to be addressed, which correspond to three broad categories of processes (Figure 5):

- Which individuals are most vulnerable to the features of settings that promote radicalisation (**the problem of vulnerability**).

- How people, through social and self-selection, come to be exposed to settings that promote radicalisation (**the problem of exposure**).

- How settings that promote radicalisation emerge (**the problem of emergence**).

The greater the knowledge about how (through what processes) settings that encourage radicalisation emerge in the environment and are sustained, and about how people — particularly, people vulnerable to radicalising moral contexts — become exposed to such settings, the greater the ability to develop effective strategies and policies to prevent people from coming to see acts of terrorism as a viable action alternative.

Figure 5 Analysing radicalisation

Individual vulnerability
to radicalising context

Exposure to
radicalising settings

Emergence of
radicalising settings
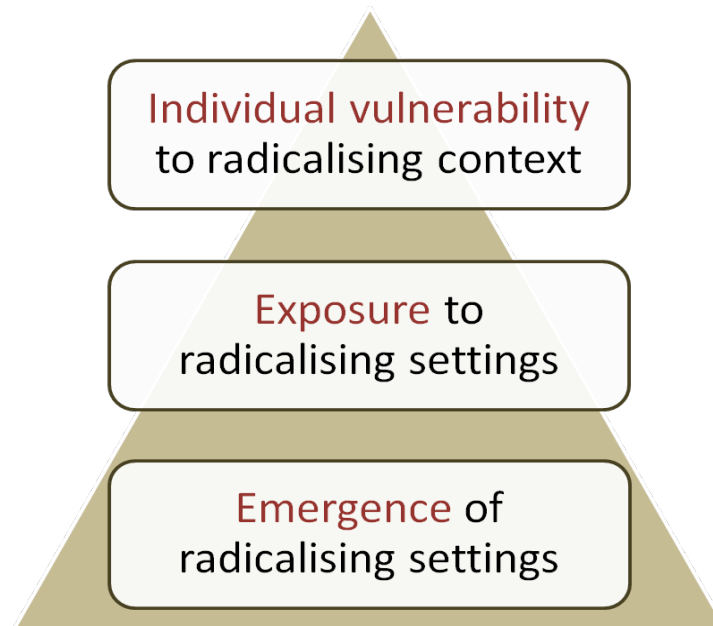
In the remaining chapters, the REAs findings are synthesised using the proposed SAT framework. The existing research into radicalisation (and NPAs) is assessed about the key issues of *vulnerability*, *exposure* and *emergence*. Some preliminary conclusions are drawn, and priorities for future research identified.

4. Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation

This section presents the results of a theory-guided Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of research on the factors and processes associated with Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR).

As stated in Chapter 2, the studies included in this REA are still largely in the early stages of scientific inquiry. As exploratory research, they can provide fodder for reasoned conjectures. However, research into AQIR has identified many individual and environmental factors associated with radicalisation. Yet some of these associations will be spurious, while others, acting as markers, could help to identify causal processes.

To make the most of this knowledge-base, the researchers analyse observations using the framework outlined in the previous chapter (Section 3.3). Findings are organised according to whether they add to an understanding of *individual vulnerability to radicalising contexts (*Section 4.1), *exposure to radicalising settings (*Section 4.2), or *emergence of radicalising settings (*Section 4.3).

The purpose here is not to summarise everything that is known about AQIR, but *what matters about what is known about AQIR*.

A glossary of technical and scientific terms used in the report can be found on page 6.

4.1 Individual vulnerability to radicalising contexts

Personal characteristics and experience are the basis of an individual's vulnerability (or lack thereof) to radicalisation. Individual factors are relevant if they affect the degree to which someone is sensitive to radicalising influence; in other words, whether exposure to radicalising environments will make someone more likely to see terrorism as something they would do. This is known as their *vulnerability to moral change*. Individual factors are also relevant when they affect someone's likelihood to be exposed (to come into contact with) radicalising environments and influence. This is known as their *vulnerability to selection*. These characteristics aren't mutually exclusive; the same factor can impact both a person's likelihood of exposure and their sensitivity to that exposure.

Research findings relevant to an understanding of individual vulnerability to AQIR concern the *phase of individual development* during which radicalisation takes place, the *morality* and the *cognitive skills* of radicalised individuals, as well as their *attachments* and *life experiences*.

4.1.1 Phase of development

Personal attributes, such as age, gender, ethnicity or religious denomination cannot be the cause of someone's actions. They lack causal power. To be male, for example, cannot be the *cause* of one's actions. However, gender can be linked to exposure to particular socialisation practices. Boys and girls are, traditionally, subject to different levels of monitoring by parents. They may spend time in

different environments. Hence, gender patterns found in the background of a group of people (for example, terrorists) may be *indicative* of (a marker for) processes that explain their actions, such as socialisation, exposure to criminogenic environments, or lack of parental monitoring. Studying people's attributes can be useful to the extent that they are plausible markers for causal processes.

Terrorism scholars recognise that a 'profiling' approach based on the study of individuals' socio-demographic attributes cannot provide an explanation of the causes of radicalisation (Sageman, 2004; Horgan, 2005b). Therefore, 'profiles' cannot be the basis of a prevention strategy. Nor are profiles useful for prediction, because most radicalised individuals share the same cultural, demographic and socio-economic characteristics as large segments of the general population, the so-called 'problem of specificity' (Sageman, 2004). Nevertheless, patterns of attributes and other empirical regularities observed in the background of radicalised individuals can suggest causal processes. One such pattern has to do with age.

The relationship between age and crime is well-documented (Farrington, 2003). First involvement in crime tends to occur in late childhood to mid-adolescence. Prevalence peaks in the late teens and desistance in the 20s. Age is associated with bio-culturally defined stages of human development.[8] Each stage comes with changes in biological maturation (for example, brain development), levels of parental monitoring, personal agency (the capacity to make things happen intentionally), and so on.

Most radicalised individuals undergo the radicalisation process as teenagers or young adults. Sageman's (2004) sample of mujahedin averages 25.7 years. The 'oldest' network in Bakker's (2006) overview of Jihadi groups in Europe averages 34 years, and the youngest 20.5. Average age across the sample was a little over 27 at the time of arrest (which is not necessarily the age at which radicalisation occurred). Precht (2007 p:25) reports a similar age range of "teenager to mid/late 20s", with a few individuals in their 30s. Silber and Bhatt (2007) also find that their subjects fall within the 15 - 35 bracket.

Periods of transition can bring changes in lifestyle; the potential for exposure to radicalising environments.

Adolescence and early adulthood are transition periods, which bring major changes in lifestyle. Monitoring from parents and teachers decreases. Personal agency increases; as they get older, individuals gain more control over where to go and who to spend time with. They spend more time outside the house and come into contact with a greater variety of places. Some of these settings may expose them to unconventional (radicalising) moral teachings. Late teens and early 20s may see them going to university, or getting a job; for some, this means expatriation. This is the case for many of the individuals in Sageman's sample. The individual's field of activity changes and expands, bringing opportunities for new life experiences and interactions with new environments. Each of

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[8] Stages of development are bio-cultural to the extent that they are not defined solely by chronological age, but also by socio-cultural practices. For example, 'adulthood' may mean different things and occur at different chronological ages in different cultures and societies.

these interactions carries in itself the potential for exposure to unconventional influences. That, in turn, carries the potential for change in the individual's propensities (notably, in their morality). Exposure to new, radicalising influences, if combined with personal vulnerabilities, may lead to radicalisation.

In sum, the age profiles of radicalised individuals suggests that times of transition are vulnerable periods in a person's life, as they involve change in their lifestyle and, subsequently, the chance of exposure to radicalising environments. Transition is part and parcel of the process of growing up, which may be why teenagers and young adults are over-represented in these samples, relative to the rest of the population. Olsen (2009) hypothesises that neurological and other physiological changes that characterise human growth may, in themselves, be grounds for vulnerability. Of course, transition and change are not limited to periods of physiological maturation (times when people are 'growing up'). Other processes, such as economic or political migration, can lead to the same changes in individuals' activity fields and exposure to radicalising settings. This could account for the presence of full-grown adults among those undergoing radicalisation.[9] For example, economic migrants might experience changes not unlike those experienced by a teenager moving away from home to attend university.

4.1.2 Moral and cognitive vulnerability

Radicalisation involves exposure to unconventional moral teachings, which a person eventually adopts as their own. The person's pre-existing morality, and their cognitive skills, are likely to play some part in their vulnerability to exposure and change. These factors deserve particular attention in the explanation of radicalisation.

The consensus is that individuals who undergo radicalisation are 'normal'. In most cases, their cognitive functions do not appear to be pathologically impaired, though Taarnby (2006) documents a few instances where an uncompromising ideological stance may have looked like mental illness, so removed were the men's moral values from conventional Western morality.

Still, two conjoined threads emerge, which touch on the role of individual morality and cognitive skills in AQIR. Most accounts indicate that the individuals involved had been experiencing some form of *moral vulnerability* when they engaged on the path to radicalisation. That vulnerability may or may not have been brought on by life experiences, by the maturation processes discussed above, or by a combination of both. Other accounts suggest that the men were also *cognitively vulnerable*, stressed and struggling to cope with their circumstances to some degree.

Sageman (2004, p:98) characterises this state of vulnerability as one of psychological and spiritual distress. Many of the men in his sample are described as "alienated". For Wiktorowicz (quoted in Neumann and Rogers, 2007, p:67), experiences that "shake certainty in previously accepted beliefs" and undermine confidence in old moral and cognitive frameworks may result in this kind of distress.

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[9] It should be noted that these transitional processes are, of course, not one-way; exposure to new settings does not *have to have* negative consequences. In a situation where an individual is raised in a moral context that promotes violence, growing up and moving away might bring an opportunity for positive (pro-social) change.

At best, the person will become curious and more open to new ideas. At worst, they will be confused and feeling undirected, in a desperate search for (spiritual) succour. Silber and Bhatt (2007) find that the people most vulnerable to radicalisation are those who stand at a crossroad in life. Their certitude in previously held beliefs has been challenged; their identity is on unstable ground. According to Neumann and Rogers (2007, p:49), this experience may be a common one among second generation Muslim youths, who have rejected parental beliefs and must look for guidance elsewhere.

Olsen (2009, p:14), who finds little evidence of 'belief-shaking' events in his interviewees' past, nevertheless describes the young men as "searching for values that [they] didn't have at home" and for a community "more spiritual than [their] family". Typically, that community is found among people willing to debate "political questions". Regarding the role of proselytising Salafi organisations, such as the Tabligh, Neumann and Rogers (2007, p:53) stress the paradoxical danger that these movements represent, preaching a non-violent Jihad to religious seekers, but refusing to engage with them on political issues, leaving their political views "completely undefined". They recount how one man was moved to make contact with a Hizb-ut Tahrir activist at Leeds Grand Mosque, in the aftermath of 9/11: "I remember thinking: 'This [9/11] changes everything'. But I admit, I was confused about it. I didn't know what Islam made of it. *Nobody was offering me direction*" (*ibid.* ,p:36; emphasis as original).

The picture is one of individuals whose guiding moral framework has been undermined, and who cope with the resulting distress by adopting new moral rules.

Some environments may trigger or exacerbate this moral and cognitive vulnerability. Trujillo *et al.* (2009, p:563) describe how the closed, inhospitable environment of a prison can combine with inmates' "lack of psychological autonomy", leaving them vulnerable to indoctrination until they shed "all responsibility in decision-making". For Hamm (2007, p:68), the experience of incarceration will lead some individuals who have been "alienated by religion" to search for alternative spiritual resources — in spite, or because, of an evangelical upbringing, which couldn't keep them from ending up behind bars. Hamm contends that these novices are particularly at risk, since they lack the religious expertise to distinguish between different (moderate and radical) interpretations of Islam and are liable to latch onto one or the other indiscriminately.

Humans are rule-guided creatures. In the absence of other support, they experience distress when their guiding framework is damaged, taken away or suddenly unsuitable to the circumstances at hand. In the context of radicalisation, the emerging picture is one of individuals whose guiding framework has been undermined — perhaps as a result of their moral development, or of situational (immediate) pressures, or both — and who lack the mental resources to cope with the distress they experience as a result. As Ridwan Al-Issar puts it (in Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p:38), a significant lifestyle change in the absence of other support creates the need for "even more guidance on how to build a new life [...]".

What follows from this kind of experience is an attempt to address the absent or defective guiding framework by adopting a new set of moral rules. Precht (2007) observes that radicalised individuals can go from no faith to faith, from faith to a radical observance of the same faith, or through conversion from one faith to another. Brandon (2009) finds that converts are over-represented among Jihadists radicalised in prison, compared with the rest of population. Bakker (2006) reports that 28% of the European Jihadists on whom he could find information (n=50) were converts. Of the rest, 50% had been raised in non-practising Muslim families and had 'rediscovered' their faith as adults. Most (95%) of the 61 individuals on whom data was available showed signs of increased religiosity prior to recruitment, either taking courses on the Koran, "vigorously debating Islam on the Internet", or leaving liberal mosques to attend more orthodox or extremist places of worship (*ibid*., p:41). Sageman (2004) also finds that almost one-half of the people on whom data were available (53 out of 108) went from a secular upbringing to a religious outlook. Wiktorowicz (2005) reports that the Al-Muhajiroun members he studied lacked a religious foundation before they joined the movement, until socialisation into the group led to the adoption of a new moral framework. Similarly, Taarnby (2006, p:64) describes the case of a Danish cell constituted around an Islamic study group whose members' "increasingly religious lifestyle" bewildered friends and family, many of whom were secular.

Neumann and Rogers (2007:75) speak of the individual being reconstructed according to a "new set of beliefs". In their study, Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman (2009, pp:12, 40) observe that the newfound religiosity will involve the adoption of a "legalistic interpretation" or "rules-based approach" to faith, which comes with "strict guidelines". That legalistic approach may result in a "hyperhabitual" morality, a diminishing of "individuals' moral decision-making". For Brandon (2009, p:19), hard-line interpretations of Islam "offer simple solutions to complex questions" in inhospitable and unsupportive environments, such as prison. Strict moral rule-guidance provides 'ready-made' answers to questions or challenges of opinion. Threats to this newfound moral stability are met with hostility. Efforts to defend authoritative sources or to seek backing from religious material, as well as attempts to impose the new rules onto others, could be interpreted as self-protective.

That said, Taarnby (2006, p:57) contrasts the "strict adherence to ritual" of some Jihadists with the superficiality of their knowledge of Islam, citing the example of a would-be suicide bomber called "Maximus", a *nom de guerre* inspired more by popular culture than by Islamist convention. There is anecdotal evidence that radicalised individuals will stray from the strict precepts of their new faith, failing to put new rules into practice in their everyday life (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, 2009).

It may be that an explicit framework of rules attracts vulnerable individuals to particular moral teachings; one can imagine that the new framework provides them with a clear set of values (and with pre-made arguments to defend these values to others), relieving some of the psychic stress of cognitive processes such as moral judgement and decision-making.

This hypothesis is compatible with anecdotal reports that a strong religious identity — in other words, a strong, stable attachment to a set of moral rules — protects against radicalisation (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, 2009). Wiktorowicz (2005), who includes a control group in his research design, finds that most of the activists who joined al-Muhajiroun were irreligious prior to their first contact with the movement and described themselves as secular, while the large majority of non-joiners said religion was a very strong influence in their lives, and described themselves first

and foremost as Muslims. Olsen (2009) observes that individuals who participate in the radical sub-culture but do not agree with the use of violence "tend to organize in different groups within the same sub-culture", or else leave the subculture altogether. This suggests that a strong commitment to moral rules that prohibit violence negates or limits the effect of exposure to violence-supportive moral contexts.

Lastly, some radicalised individuals have a prior history of involvement in crime and delinquency, which would indicate a weak conventional morality. Based on his sample of 242 Jihadist terrorists, Bakker (2006) estimates that almost one quarter of European terrorists had a record for a common offence (unrelated to terrorist activity) before they were arrested, and that some of them had a history of abusing alcohol and drugs. In a couple of cases, the addicts turned to Islam as a form of self-help, to 'kick the habit'. Silber and Bhatt's (2007) study of several major western European jihadist cells also finds that many of the individuals involved had delinquent pasts. Needless to say, the prison studies all concern individuals with a (sometimes serious) criminal record.

A strong commitment to moral rules that prohibit violence could lower sensitivity to violence-supportive contexts.

4.1.3 Attachments and social bonds

Individuals come by their morality through socialisation. The key mechanisms involved in socialisation are *teaching* (of moral rules) and *monitoring* (of behaviour), including the sanctioning of bad behaviour (such as experiences of deterrence that people go through personally or observe happening to others). If the moral rules that a person is taught are in line with the conventional rules held by the society in which they live, and if their behaviour is monitored consistently (if rule-breaking is consistently sanctioned), this will likely result in a strong commitment to conventional rules, and it is unlikely that they will come to perceive unconventional (that is, criminal) action as a viable alternative. The level of *nurturing* that a person experiences will have an impact on the development of the cognitive skills needed to regulate reactions and make decisions. This includes skills such as self-control. Nurturing will have the most impact on cognitive development at critical stages in life, such as during childhood and adolescence.

How much of an impact socialisation practices (teaching and monitoring) will have on moral development is likely to depend on the person's *attachment* to the sources of the teaching and monitoring — such as parents, friends, teachers and other authority figures. Attachment is generally the outcome of *caring*. Individuals get attached to the people who provide for their physical and emotional well-being. Changes in an individual's attachments over the life-course may lead to changes in the socialisation practices that have influence over them. If these new attachments go hand in hand with conflicting moral teachings, this may lead to changes in morality. If the newly internalised moral rules are supportive of (terrorist) violence, radicalisation can occur.

Data on the pre-existing attachments of radicalised individuals are scarce and anecdotal. Whether change in attachments is a factor in, or the outcome of, the radicalisation process is difficult to establish.[10]

On the one hand, the voluntary or involuntary severing of past social ties (and, by extension, attachments) seems to contribute to the individual's state of vulnerability. For Sageman's (2004) mujahedin, the psychological and spiritual distress they experienced may have been precipitated by expatriation and relocation. The men left behind families otherwise described as supportive and well-integrated in their society of origin. They found themselves cut off from traditional institutions, social networks, and other sources of personal and social support. Their situation echoes the experience of prison inmates, deprived of access to intimate networks of support, which they may try to recreate inside the prison. On the other hand, severing pre-existing attachments may be the result of individuals adopting conflicting moral rules. Links with friends and families baffled by, or even hostile to, new beliefs and behaviours can be wilfully broken (Neumann and Rogers, 2007). Pressure from intimates may drive individuals to hide their activities and distance themselves (Wiktorowicz, 2005).

If change in the individual's patterns of attachment can be a source of vulnerability, stability in attachments may be a source of protection. Like a strong pre-existing commitment to conventional morality, strong attachments could inure individuals to enticements to moral change. Useem and Clayton (2009, p:566) find that, while the inmates they interviewed had cynical attitudes towards US involvement in the Middle East, 9/11 made them feel "like everyone else in America", because they saw the attacks as being directed against their country and their families. They felt a "duty" to report any terrorist activity to the prison wardens, since they were "all born Americans" and the terrorists were out to "kill [their] family". This institutional loyalty contrasts with the attitude of European jihadists, who have forged emotional ties to a self-made community of likeminded individuals in lieu of attachment to a society towards which they feel hostile (Jordan *et al.*, 2008) — a "place of residence and not one of belonging" (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p:56).

The relationship between old and new attachments or bonds appears competitive; new social ties come at the expense of existing ones (Genkin and Gutfraind, 2008). The exception is a situation in which family and friends are radicalised together (Bakker, 2006; Jordan *et al.*, 2008). By and large, the AQIR literature is more interested in the role of new (group-based) attachments in promoting and maintaining individuals' terrorism propensity, than with the role of historical attachments in fostering, or preventing, individual vulnerability to AQIR. Within-group attachments are discussed in a later section on exposure to sources of radicalisation (Section 4.2.1).

4.1.4 Life experience and personal preferences

Most process models of radicalisation see *life experiences* (or *life events)* as key factors in the explanation of AQIR. Examples of such meaningful events range from the mundane to the traumatic, such as moving house, starting school, losing a job, getting married, going to prison, being

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[10] The process is likely to be entangled.

discriminated against, being a victim of violence, or experiencing the loss of a loved one.[11] In some cases, these events are said to result in 'cognitive openings'. They bring on self-doubt, psychological distress, or some other psychic change, which leads the individual to 'seek' a moral (often religious) solution to the perceived problem (Wiktorowicz, 2005).

Why some individuals experience events as cognitive openings when others do not is unclear.[12] Whether strong socialisation and cognitive skills protect people against the destabilising effect of life events or whether the caring and nurturing (and associated social capital) involved in strong socialisation and cognitive skills mediate these effects also remains to be established.

Without denying that life events can have a loosely-defined 'cognitive effect' on individuals, another way to think of the role of life events and life experiences in the acquisition of a terrorism propensity is to think of their impact on the individual's *activity field*, and on their *preferences*. An activity field is made up of the settings in which a person develops and acts. Broadly speaking, it is the sum of the environments to which they are exposed over a given period of time. Preferences are the wants and desires that a person acquires over their life course, as a result of their experiences.[13]

As discussed, maturation — the process of growing up — entails changes in agency (how much power someone has to do what they want to do) and changes in people's field of activity. Life events can bring similar changes in the breadth and type of environments people experience. Any change has the potential to result in exposure to new socialisation practices. Going to university is an example of a life event that results in significant changes: change in the extent to which the individual's behaviour is monitored and possibly sanctioned; change in the sources of that monitoring; change in the content of the moral teachings to which they are exposed; and change in the kind of people who will care for them (or those they come to perceive as taking care of them). At university, people make new friends, become embedded in new social networks, and get attached to new sources of authority whose influence may come to supplant that of parents and of the local community. They may get exposed to a wider set of — possibly conflicting — norms, rules and values.

The expatriates in Sageman's (2004) sample are examples of the effect that a life event (moving to another country) can have on an activity field and, consequently, on changes in exposure. Former sources of monitoring, moral teaching and caring (parents, friends, institutions of their community of origin) have been left behind. Their agency has been diminished, because of their precarious cultural, economic and social situation as recent migrants. Their attempts to compensate for both these losses bring them in contact with settings (for example, radical mosques) where they get exposed to radicalising agents. External inducements (new attachments; a dependence on new people for their well-being) open them up to the influence of new moral teachings. Imprisonment is another example of a life event that impacts an individual's activity field in drastic ways, exposing the individual to new settings – hence, new sources of teaching, monitoring and caring, like informal religious authorities and prison gangs (Hamm, 2007; Brandon, 2009).

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[11] Life events can have a socio-cultural dimension. For example, marriage may have quite different implications in different societies or communities. This should be kept in mind when drawing comparisons on the role of particular life events across different populations.
[12] What process (for example neuropsychological mechanism) underpins a 'cognitive opening' is also unclear. Overall, the concept is poorly defined.

Of course, a life event does not have to be traumatic to play a part. Any event that leads to a lasting change in the kind of places a person is exposed to day-to-day has the potential to impact on that individual's propensities. If the change in their activity field leads to a sustained exposure to radicalising settings, they may come to see acts of terrorism as a viable action alternative. In other words, they may acquire a propensity for terrorism.

Above all, life experience influences a person's activity field through the formation of *preferences*. Over the course of their lives, people will acquire preferences for particular types of settings; places where they think that they will be able to fulfil their wants and desires.[14] Crucially, these places may have other, incidental characteristics, including criminogenic features.

For example, adolescents may go to nightclubs because they prefer loud, crowded places where they can dance all night long. *Incidentally*, their preference exposes them to the criminogenic features of the club: the availability of alcohol and drugs; the lack of formal supervision; the company of peers who think that taking drugs is all right in this setting. In the short term, that exposure may influence the adolescents' actions (if they lack sufficient self-control), and in the long run, it can affect their propensity to perceive drug-taking as a viable action alternative.

In the context of AQIR, life experiences that result in the formation of wants and desires, which a person tries to fulfil in (often incidentally) radicalising settings, will play their part in the radicalisation process.

 The AQIR literature tends to put these factors (personal preferences and the experiences that bring them about) under the category of 'motivations'. However, motivation is a situational (short-term) process, not a developmental (long-term) one. While individuals can be motivated to *act* (for example, commit an act of terrorism), they cannot be *motivated to be radicalised* (for example, to acquire the propensity to see terrorism as viable). For the sake of analytical clarity, life experience is viewed as a factor influencing the formation of personal preference, rather than as a source of 'motivation'. Personal preference is, in turn, the main mechanism by which individuals come to place themselves in particular settings (more on this in the next section).

Among the sources of 'motivation' identified by the AQIR literature are events that provoke negative feelings, such as experiences of injustice or humiliation. This category of motivation is often called *grievances*. Mohammad Sidique Khan is said to have been moved by a sentiment of grievance, inspired by what Khan perceived as "injustices carried out by the West against Muslims around the world" (House of Commons report on the 7 July attacks in London, cited in Precht ,2007, p:50). Precht suggests that high-visibility incidents such as the Danish cartoons affair[15] have the potential to rouse individuals to similar moral outrage, moving them to act. Neumann and Rogers (2007) contend that the purpose of Jihadist videos showing images of conflicts in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Iraq or Palestine is to bring on moral questioning and outrage in their audience, linking pre-existing individual grievances to the plight of Muslims everywhere in order to induce what has been dubbed

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[13] Preferences are relative. Some wants and desires are, of course, stronger than others.

[14] Preferences will have a greater impact on a person's activity field as that person's agency increases; in other words, as they gain more control over their choices and actions, usually as a result of growing up. They are better able to act upon their own wants and desires as they gain independence.

[15] This refers to a series of editorial cartoons depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad, published in a Danish newspaper in September 2005. These depictions sparked protests in several countries.

"humiliation by proxy" (Khosrokhavar, 2002, p:152) and "moral shock" (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p:30). While most of Olsen's (2009) interviewees couldn't recall personal experiences of humiliation leading them towards extremist groups, once involved all of them saw their actions as a way of relieving humiliations experienced by helpless others. For Olsen, this suggests that humiliation by proxy is not a causal factor in the initial decision to join a radical group, but a form of justification after the facts. Nevertheless, some of his interviewees report experiencing prior frustration "over the state of things", which led to them to want to "break loose" from society (*ibid*., p:32).

Negative emotions paving the way for grievance are also thought to arise from the experience of economic frustration. Several of the Jihadists studied by Sageman (2004) were either unemployed or underemployed at the time they joined the Jihad and may have perceived themselves as, relatively or absolutely, economically deprived. Similarly, repeated experiences of dispossession, racism or other forms of discriminatory victimisation, or clashes between the religious and cultural requirements of prisoners and the constraints of prison life for example, the requirement for modesty versus compulsory strip search (Brandon, 2009) are thought to provide motivational breeding grounds for radicalisation in prisons.

It is plausible that these kinds of life experiences, or life events, matter to the extent that they shape or influence, in the short term or over time, people's preferences, since it is on the basis of these preferences (these wants and desires) that individuals choose where to spend their time.

For instance, experiences of victimisation in prison can result in a preference for settings that offer physical protection. Experiences of discrimination in day-to-day life can lead to a preference for environments where discrimination is less likely to occur, such as settings that are culturally homogeneous. Experiences of 'moral shock' said to follow exposure to disturbing material may not so much trigger a 'cognitive opening' as much as the desire to share reactions to the experience (to 'air grievances') or to seek out advice on how to cope with unexpected feelings. In the first case, the inmate in search of protection starts to hang out with members of a prison gang, some of whom may hold radical views. In the second, the individual who feels discriminated against begins to spend more time in places frequented only by members of his own cultural group, and may come in contact with radicalising agents who belong to the same group. In the third, the young man morally outraged by images of his suffering kinsmen searches for emotional support and a sympathetic ear,

Table 1 Factors and processes contributing to individual vulnerability to radicalising contexts

	KEY PROCESSES	MAIN FACTORS	EXAMPLES
INDIVIDUAL VULNERABILITY	**Individual development**	*Periods of transition characterised by:* • Neurological and physiological change (that is, maturation). • Reduced supervision by parents and other authorities. • Increased agency. • Change in lifestyle. • Interaction with new environments.	• AQIR is a 'youth' phenomenon. • Great majority of subjects fall within 15 – 35 age bracket. • Transition to new environments brought on by political or economic migration, moving to university, getting a job.
	Moral and cognitive vulnerability	*Vulnerability characterised by:* • Weak commitment to conventional moral framework • Experience that undermines values and beliefs • Few cognitive resources to cope with lack of guidance • Need for new, clear moral rules to compensate • Sensitivity to radicalising moral teachings	• Expatriates feel 'alienated' in new society. • Feeling that no one is offering political "direction". • Distress brought on by prison experience. • Adoption of 'legalistic' interpretations of religious frameworks.
	Attachments and social bonds	*Vulnerability characterised by:* • Voluntary or involuntary severing of social ties. • Whether cause or effect of AQIR (or both) is unclear. • Cutting-off from supportive institutions. • Competition between old and new (radical) attachments.	• Migration results in loss of social support from established networks and institutions. • Families and friends break contact as individual expresses new radical beliefs.
	Life experience and personal preferences	*Life event that results in:* • Change in individual's physical and social environment. • Emergence of personal wants or desires, which lead to: • preferences for particular kinds of settings, some of which have (coincidentally or not) radicalising features	• Change in environment can result from getting a job, going to school, moving house or country... • Preference change can result from experiences of victimisation, 'moral shock', discrimination, excitement...

and ends up in a setting that happens to have radicalising features — such as an Internet forum with members who hold both conventional and unconventional views.

In sum, preference — for physical protection, psychological safety, a receptive audience, action, and so on — is an important factor in the explanation of how people come to be exposed to radicalising settings. *Exposure*, in turn, is the key process that links individual characteristics and environmental features in the explanation of radicalisation. To understand how certain kinds of (vulnerable) people are influenced by certain kinds of (radicalising) settings, there is a need to understand exposure.

Table 1 provides a summary of the key processes and factors that contribute to individual vulnerability to radicalising contexts.

To understand radicalisation, there is a need to understand 'selection': How certain kinds of people come to be exposed to certain kinds of settings.

4.2 Exposure to radicalising settings

AQIR studies all concur that radicalisation happens in *settings*. References abound to 'recruitment magnets', 'radicalisation incubators' and other 'vehicles for radicalisation'. However, radicalising settings in themselves cannot influence an individual's propensity to see acts of terrorism as an action alternative. To have an impact, radicalising settings must be found within the individual's activity field. It is the (repeated) *exposure* of the individual to the moral context of these settings that results (or does not result) in radicalisation, depending on the person's sensitivity to the radicalising features of the setting. Vulnerable people will be more sensitive to the influence of these features than less vulnerable (better protected) people.

To understand the radicalisation process, it is necessary to understand how individuals with specific characteristics come to be exposed to specific kinds of settings. In other words, it is necessary to understand the process of individual *selection*. In this section, the REA's findings regarding the radicalising features of settings are synthesised. The selection processes through which particular kinds of people become exposed to particular kinds of settings are then examined. S*elf-selection* is addressed first, followed by *social selection*.

4.2.1 Radicalising settings

Settings are made up of the persons, objects, and events to which a person is directly exposed through their senses, and to which they react, including any media present, such as television or the Internet. Features of a setting that can have an influence on the development of people's propensities, including a terrorism propensity, are the *socialisation practices* that take place in the setting. These include *the moral rules promoted in the setting* (moral teachings) and the *monitoring*

that takes place in the setting (the extent to which behaviour is supervised and regulated). The impact of these socialisation practices on the individual is likely to vary according to that individual's *attachment* to the setting's socialising agents (for example, authorities, family, peers). People are more likely to be influenced by the actions and opinions of those they look up to or care about.

Moral teachings and moral rules

In the context of AQIR, radicalising settings are settings that promote interpretations of the Islamic faith favourable (or at the very least not adverse) to the use of violence in support of social, religious and political objectives. In his study of Al-Muhajiroun, a transnational radical Islamic movement, Wiktorowicz (2005, p:64) explains that the movement's teachings — among them that Muslims are obliged to "cooperate on all good deeds" — lay out the groundwork for (possibly active) support of terrorist acts.

Researchers stress the 'borderline' quality of the terrorist-supporting moral teachings to which individuals are exposed. The radicalising narrative builds upon the same core texts and references as mainstream ideologies, sometimes in a superficial "cut-and-paste" fashion (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p:38). This can lead to situations in which both conventional and unconventional moral teachings are present in the same setting. People with "novice levels of religious expertise" may not be able to tell apart conventional from unconventional teachings - that is, tell apart radical from mainstream interpretations of Islam - (Hamm, 2007, p:109). Such individuals may be particularly vulnerable to the radicalising features of this kind of mixed setting. The Internet can be seen as an extreme case of mixed setting, where many kinds of moral rules are promoted 'side-by-side', by virtue of web browsing and search functions.

Other radicalising settings openly promote unconventional moral rules. Taarnby (2006, p:70) observes that in Denmark, mosques draw worshippers "who know exactly which interpretation of Islam they want to hear". Sageman (2004) links several of the individuals in his sample to specific mosques in London and New York, known for their ties to the "global Salafi Jihad".

Overall, radical moral teachings can be characterised as action-oriented, transcendental, simplistic, and absolute. They are couched in a narrative format, which connects individual wants and desires to a set of values and prescriptions for action (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). It is possible that a narrative format combined with absolute (right-wrong), prescriptive moral teachings make for a moral framework that can be quickly internalised by individuals, especially youths, who are more susceptible to categorical thinking. Presented in this way, radical ideologies may offer individuals with low human and social capital, such as prison inmates, a relatively simple set of rules to follow in a situation that is socially and psychologically taxing (Brandon, 2009).

Once adopted, the unconventional morality forms a *moral filter*. Faced with an opportunity to act, motivated individuals will perceive the situation through that filter, and terrorist violence will appear to them a viable way to act upon their motivation. In the words of Wiktorowicz (2005, pp210–211), radical socialising practices, couched in transcendental terms, inculcate "values of violence and risky activism", shaping action by "rendering some choices imaginable".

Monitoring

A key feature of a setting's moral context is the level of monitoring. Settings involved in the development of criminal propensities tend to be settings where people spend time in the company of likeminded peers, and where they can express or enact violations of rules and norms without interference from formal or informal authorities, such as police or parents.

Like other criminogenic settings, radicalising settings often suffer from a monitoring deficit. In some instances, unconventional proselytising has gone on unchallenged by the people with authority of the setting. When local authorities have chosen to act instead, radicalising activity has been known to displace to more private settings. Neumann and Rogers (2007) recount how mosque committees have taken action to expel extremists recruiting on the mosque's grounds, only to see them move their operation outside, beyond the committee's sphere of influence.

Generational and cultural disparities between authorities and the local youth, such as imams not speaking the local language (Precht, 2007), may also decrease the effectiveness of informal monitoring where it operates. Cultural barriers can even interfere with formal monitoring mechanisms. For example, if prison guards cannot understand words exchanged between prisoners, they cannot detect radicalising activity and intervene (Trujillo *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, it has been suggested that the higher level of monitoring taking place in prisons (relative to the outside world) is effective in preventing radicalisation. The self-contained environment of the prison limits opportunities to displace activity away from surveillance. Useem and Clayton (2009, p:569) attribute the virtual absence of radicalisation in US prisons to successful governance and a general increase in order, which has made it easier for correctional staff to spot "deviant activity".

> *Increasingly, radicalisation takes place in private settings,*
> *where socialising practices are weakly monitored.*

The current trend has been for activists to withdraw from places supervised by agents of the state and community leaders (Neumann and Rogers, 2007). Though first contact may still happen, for instance, in places of worship sympathetic to unconventional interpretations of the Islamic tradition, radicalisation takes place increasingly in private settings, such as flats and houses, or in weakly monitored spaces, such as cafes, bookshops, clubs, summer camps, prison courtyards or sports grounds (Hamm, 2007; Neumann and Rogers, 2007; Silber and Bhatt, 2007). The Internet, which affords at least the illusion, if not the reality, of a complete lack of monitoring, contributes to the 'privatisation' of radicalising spaces. Media and other means of communication help circumvent formal measures to limit radicalising exposure. For example, radicalising materials have been successfully introduced through the post and other means in prisons (Hamm, 2007; Trujillo *et al.*, 2009).

What emerges is a picture of radicalising settings as places where socialisation practices are weakly monitored. This monitoring deficit can result from a lack of awareness of the activity taking place, a lack of willingness to disrupt said activity, or a lack of formal or informal resources. When monitoring

is implemented, the radicalising activity displaces to private or semi-private settings, where unconventional moral rules can be promoted unchallenged. In this sense, monitoring and enforcement will have unintended effects, unless displacement of the activity can be anticipated and countered.[16]

Attachments to radicalising agents

To be radicalised is to internalise moral rules that support terrorism.[17] The strength with which the new rules are internalised is likely to depend upon the strength of the attachment formed between the person being radicalised and the agents of moral socialisation involved in the process. Attachments tend to form with people who provide for the individual's physical and emotional (including spiritual) well-being, and indeed the AQIR studies stress the interpersonal, even intimate, dimension of the radicalisation process. As previously stated, the pattern appears to be one of competitive attachment between sources of caring *in* and sources of caring *out* of the radicalising context. Attachment to sources of conventional socialisation, such as friends and family, has already been discussed in the context of individual vulnerability (Section 4.1.3). This section focuses on attachment to sources of unconventional socialisation, or *radicalising agents*, notably *moral authorities* and *peers*.

Moral authorities, also known as "spiritual sanctioners" (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p:38), are key agents of radicalisation. A hallmark of radicalisation is that individuals come to trust exclusively in the pronouncements of a "select and ideologically rigid set of religious authorities" (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, 2009). A one-on-one relationship, or a small-group setting, is likely to facilitate the delivery of moral teachings and the internalisation of new moral rules (as in any other tutorial system of education). Sources of authority do not have to be physically present in the individual's environment, but they often are.

In the context of AQIR, these authorities can be sanctioned or self-styled. Radicalising imams do not have to officiate from a mosque; they can instead be "self-proclaimed" and self-taught religious scholars with no formal sanction or training (Taarnby, 2006). Neumann and Rogers (2007, p:58) suggest that the influence of self-styled radical imams is stronger in northern Europe than in southern Europe, notably Spain. They contend that these imams appeal mostly to second and third generations of Muslim immigrants, providing them with an "ideological template", which they use to articulate grievances towards their parents' generation and towards the West. The imams' ability to address young Muslims in the language of their country of birth, rather than in the language of their parents, may grant them privileged access to that generation. However, since Muslim immigration is more recent in Southern Europe, such a community of language does not have the same impact.

Regardless, the importance of religious authorities seems to be declining. Militant activists are the new agents of influence, perhaps because they are less 'visible', especially if they operate away from

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[16] For example, a situation where an individual expressing curiosity or a passing interest for a violence-supporting interpretation of a mainstream ideology will be turned away from conventional settings by well-meaning authorities and will search out 'riskier' settings, looking for a sympathetic ear.

[17] This definition finds echo in Silber and Bhatt's (2007, p:36) definition of indoctrination as "the acceptance of a religious-political world view that justifies, legitimizes, encourages or supports violence...".

public places of congregation (Neumann and Rogers, 2007). They are less likely to become known and to attract formal monitoring.

Other studies concur that radicalising agents do not have to be 'authorities' in the strictest sense. They can be more experienced members of the group or the organisation joined by an individual. Olsen (2009, p:26) speaks of figures in "secret" movements who appear as "rock stars of the subculture" to novices looking from the outside in. These figures do not have to be directly involved in terrorist activity. Older radicals may stick around to mentor new recruits (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). Taarnby's (2006, p:60) network analysis of the Danish Jihadist movement suggests that "propagandists" and other "charismatic figures" play the role of hubs, connecting local networks over time and space, as well as providing a bridge to a wider, global movement, while not being directly involved in violence. Hamm (2007) argues that charismatic leaders play as important a role in prison radicalisation as does deprivation, though this conclusion is drawn from a very limited number of case studies. More importantly, his research, as well as Trujillo *et al.*'s (2009), suggests that hub-type figures can be vectors of radical ideas, imported inside the closed setting of the prison while visiting prisoners — sometimes with the consent of prison authorities — communicating with them over mobile phones, or providing them with extremist material in the form of books and DVDs.

Spiritual authorities and activists aside, an individual's peers, their 'companions in radicalisation', are the primary source of radicalising influence. Sageman (2004, p:135) has famously argued that one should "blame global Salafi terrorist activity on in-group love" rather than out-group hate. Though some believe that Sageman overstates what has become known as the "bunch of guys" explanation (Neumann and Rogers, 2007), other researchers concur that that AQIR is a "group-based" phenomenon and that attachment to other group members plays a central part in the radicalisation process (Precht, 2007; Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Olsen, 2009).[18] Few individuals who graduated to violent involvement have been known to radicalise in isolation, though the fact of the matter is not always easy to establish.

Pressure from friends and family to give up any interest in unconventional ideologies may compel people to hide their activities (Wiktorowicz, 2005) and drive them further into the arms of a small group of peers who share their newfound interests. Attachment to the members of the radical group supplants attachment to others. Fellow Jihadists become a makeshift family. Intense attachments may be forged during activities such as travelling abroad together, or being on the same sports team (Precht, 2007). Group members provide for each other's well-being; they become the main source of caring in each other's lives, and through this mechanism their socialising influence on each other grows. This is clearly the case in a prison setting, where affiliation to a religious group or gang can fulfil the inmate's need for "friendship, emotional support and [physical] protection" (Brandon, 2009, pp:24–25).

Members monitor each other, ensuring constancy of commitment to the rules of the group. Social isolation is also a factor in the internalisation of new rules and a lasting commitment to the new

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[18] While motivation for terrorist acts is not addressed in this REA, it should be noted that motivation for action (terrorism) can arise from commitment to the group, whereby participating in terrorist acts is a fulfilment of one's duty to the group, and the content of the moral rules internalised within the group support the use of violence in carrying out that duty.

moral framework; members are isolated from conflicting moral contexts — sources of conventional moral teachings, monitoring and attachment — which could counter-balance radicalising influences and effect changes of their own (Neumann and Rogers, 2007; Precht, 2007; Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Brandon, 2009).

On a side note, the central role of attachment in socialisation could explain the reportedly limited role played by the Internet in the radicalisation process. Without interpersonal contact and trust, the bonding process necessary to form attachments is impaired. New, perhaps conflicting, moral teachings cannot be internalised as quickly or deeply in the non-physical environment.

The limited role of the Internet may be explained by the difficulty to form attachments over the web, given impediments to interpersonal contact and trust.

4.2.2 Selection

For people to be exposed to radicalising influences, including new attachments, they must come to be in places where these influences are found. This is known as the problem of *selection*. Put simply, selection is the process by which certain kinds of people end up in certain kinds of settings.

Selection can be based on personal factors, in which case it is called *self-selection*. Self-selection operates when individuals end up in a particular setting because of their individual characteristics (for example, intelligence, experience). As discussed previously, people's wants and desires (their preferences) attract them to particular kinds of places (safe places, exciting places, and so on, see Section 4.1.4). Selection based on preferences is an instance of self-selection. Selection can also be the outcome of social factors and characteristics; it is then called *social selection*. A person's ethnicity, their gender, their economic class are factors of social selection. Given the way a particular society is organised, these characteristics will influence the settings individuals are likely to find themselves in, compared with individuals without these characteristics.

Social selection tends to set the stage. It influences, maybe even limits, the kinds of settings a person finds him/herself in or has access to. Self-selection, then, takes place within these boundaries.

Social selection

Broadly speaking, social selection operates on the basis of people's socio-demographic characteristics. An individual's place of residence, the neighbourhood in which they live, the social networks to which they belong, their cultural or ethno-religious affiliations impact the probability that they will find themselves in particular settings.

For instance, individuals from a Muslim background are much more likely to find themselves in a setting (mosque, Islamic study group) where Muslims routinely congregate compared with

individuals from a non-Muslim background. Students are more likely to have the time and opportunity to spend several hours a day surfing the Internet than working people. Unemployed individuals are more likely to spend time in cafes during traditional work hours than individuals who work. People with a criminal history are more likely than non-offenders to be ever exposed to a prison setting, or to be sought out by other criminals for their skills in the trade. An inmate of a particular religion or ethnicity is more likely to affiliate with a gang made up of members with these same attributes. People driven out of their countries to seek political or economic refuge are much more likely to be exposed to the environment of an asylum seeker reception centre, one of the 'places of vulnerability' identified by Neumann and Rogers (2007).

These are some examples of social selection processes that can account, in part, for why certain people are more likely to be exposed to certain environments, some of which will contain radicalising settings.

The AQIR literature focuses heavily on the selective role of social bonds — social networks in particular. People are brought into contact with radicalising moral contexts through pre-existing bonds with relatives, friends or acquaintances. Jordan *et al.* (2008) note that the social networks involved in the Madrid bombings were based on long-held friendships and blood ties. Genkin and Gutfraind's (2008) simulation of a self-assembling cell suggests that groups that come together through pre-existing ties of friendship are more likely to lead to larger, more stable cells later on; a friend met through another friend is more likely to be a good match than someone met on the sole basis of shared space, even if that space is a 'radicalisation magnet'. This is supported by the observation that terrorist networks tend toward homophily (association between people based on similarity), notably in terms of age (Bakker, 2006).

Social selection through pre-existing networks may account for the diversity of radicalising settings, notably the ubiquity of private and semi-private places. The presence of a radicalised (or radicalising) individual in a person's social network heightens the probability of exposure to a radicalising moral context, even in the absence of obvious places acting as 'radicalisation magnets' in that person's activity field.

Although it is rarely discussed as such, the most conspicuous factors of social selection among radicalised individuals are: a pre-existing religious affiliation to Islam; a secular affiliation to an Islamic culture; or residence in a Muslim community. It might be said that these factors provide the basis of a pre-existing 'sensitivity' to Al Qa'ida's discourse, if only because radicalising agents borrow heavily from Islamic symbols and terms of reference (see Section 5.3.3 on the role 'framing' in the spread of radicalising narratives). Whether that is the correct interpretation is far from clear, based on what little evidence is available.

A 'high-risk' lifestyle is one that repeatedly exposes
people to radicalising settings, largely as a result of
social selection and self-selection.

The role of these factors (affiliation to Islamic religion and/or culture) can also be interpreted in light of mechanisms already known to intervene in the development of criminal propensity, here, social selection. Radicalised individuals are predominantly Muslim because radicalising settings are found in places mainly frequented by Muslims. They are much more likely to be exposed to radicalising practices compared with non-Muslims, much like Christians are much more likely to be exposed to socialising practices that take place primarily in churches or in other places frequented regularly and mainly by Christians.

If radicalising settings were suddenly to be found in more widely selecting environments, the socio-cultural backgrounds of radicalised individuals might be expected to diversify. In the long run, this may be one of the effects of the Internet and other technologies of mass communication.

Self-selection

Self-selection occurs when a person ends up in a setting because of their personal characteristics or history. Personal preferences (the person's wants and desires) are one of the main personal factors affecting selection.

Crucially, preferences can land individuals in radicalising settings *in an incidental way*. Individuals do not have to seek out radicalising settings purposefully to end up exposing themselves, although they sometimes do (for example, when travelling abroad to a training camp for aspiring mujahedin in Afghanistan, often at a later stage of the radicalising process - Neumann and Rogers, 2007).

Thrill-seeking (Olsen, 2009) or spiritual-seeking (Wiktorowicz, 2005), a desire for social status (Olsen, 2009) or a sense of belonging (Precht, 2007), for companionship (Hamm, 2007), a preoccupation with action (Silber and Bhatt, 2007) — these are some of the wants and desires that an individual tries to fulfil in specific places (for example, exciting places, places where people with shared interests congregate). Some of these settings may *incidentally* have radicalising features, exposing the individual to conflicting moral teachings and opportunities for attachment to radicalising agents in a poorly monitored environment.

The 'incidental' nature of many radicalising settings is reflected in the wide array of places that have featured in the radicalisation process, such as restaurants, tea houses or gyms (Jordan *et al.*, 2005), prison courtyards, "chow halls" or cellblocks (Hamm, 2007; Trujillo *et al.*, 2009), youth clubs, workplaces or any place where people practice sporting activities in small groups, bringing together friends and likeminded people (Precht, 2007). Genkin and Gutfraind (2008) distinguish these "neutral social sites" from "radicalisation magnets". Their model suggests that neutral sites contribute to the radicalisation process almost as much as places where known radicalising agents congregate. A key property of these neutral sites is that they facilitate the "rewiring of ties" (p 33) between individuals who share a sensitivity to radicalising influences.

As well as landing people in so-called neutral sites, personal preferences can also lead individuals to 'radicalisation magnets', such as religious study groups or bookstores, places of worship (including mosques which double as educational, welfare or cultural centres), or cultural or political organisations—settings where individuals with similar interests and concerns come together. Olsen (2009, p:19) recounts that his young interviewees held "a strong belief that one could make a

difference in the world by doing the 'right thing'", which led them to seek out, first, sympathetic political subcultures, and second, action-oriented groups of individuals.

Olsen describes how a preference for political action common to many youths led one individual to take part in a demonstration, where he observed a group of young people rioting, and "thought that that was really exciting ... this group, they were all my age, I could identify with them and they made something of themselves" (quoted in Olsen, 2009, p:14). He later approached them. This example illustrates how the qualities of a setting (opportunity for excitement and action) acts as a personal draw and almost accidentally brings someone in contact with the group of people who will later introduce them to a violence-supportive moral framework. Self-selection being an ongoing process, new preferences formed during the initial stages of radicalisation will lead, over time, to further exposure to 'stronger' radicalising settings, such as the training camps mentioned previously.

Given this analysis, a 'high-risk' lifestyle for radicalisation can be described as one that repeatedly exposes people to the radicalising features in their environment, as a result of social and self-selection processes. Whether the individuals exposed are sensitive to that influence is a matter of their vulnerability at the time of exposure, as previously discussed (Section 4.1).

Table 2 provides a summary of the key factors and processes that contribute to individual exposure to radicalising settings.

Table 2 Factors and processes contributing to individual exposure to radicalising settings

	KEY FACTORS		MAIN PROCESSES	EXAMPLES
EXPOSURE	**Radicalising settings**		*Radicalising settings are characterised by:* • Socialising practices that promote violence, including: • Transcendental, absolute and action-oriented unconventional moral teachings, often present alongside conventional teachings. • Deficit of supervision by formal or informal authorities. • Opportunity to create attachments to radicalising agents (for example, 'spiritual sanctioners', activists, propagandists, peers). • Displacement towards increasingly private settings.	• Mixed settings, where different interpretations of Islam are present, for example, study group, mosque, online forum. • Weakly-monitored places, for example, bookshops, clubs, summer camps, prison courtyards. • Role of 'charismatic' figures in prison. • Settings that facilitate intense attachments, for example, prison gang, sports team.
	Selection	**Social selection**	• Based on people's socio-demographic characteristics, including their social networks, which: • Make them more likely to find themselves in some places than others. • Factors that increase risk of exposure are determined by location of radicalising settings. • Social selection sets the stage for self-selection.	• Pre-existing ties of friendship or kinship expose people to radicalised friends. • Occupation, for example, students are more likely to be exposed to unmonitored political settings. • Greater likelihood of exposure if affiliated to Islamic culture, or living in a Muslim community, compared with other people.
		Self-selection	• Based on personal factors, notably people's preferences (wants and desires), which are: • Fulfilled in particular kinds of settings, including 'radicalisation magnets' and 'neutral sites'. • Neutral social sites can contribute to the 'rewiring of ties' between people sensitive to radicalising influence. • Preferences continue to form and can lead to selection of 'strong' settings over time.	• Preferences that can 'incidentally' expose to radicalising settings, for example, thrill-seeking, desire for social status, preoccupation with political action. • Can expose people to 'neutral' (for example, sporting club) or 'strong' (for example, political organisation, religious study group) radicalising settings. • Preferences for stronger settings form over time (for example, training camps).

4.3 Emergence of radicalising settings

Before people can be exposed to radicalising influence, radicalising settings have to be present in their environment. This is the problem of *emergence*. Understanding the factors that make people vulnerable to the influence of radicalising settings (Section 4.1) and the processes by which they come into contact with these settings (Section 4.2) is not enough. To explain radicalisation, it is also necessary to understand how the settings that make radicalisation possible emerge in people's environment and are sustained. How radicalising moral contexts (broadly, moral teachings that support terrorism, available in places that are weakly monitored) come to *be found* in the environment, and why they *remain*, are the key questions that must be answered.

4.3.1 Causes of the causes

Meso- and macro-level processes of possible relevance to the problem of emergence include segregation (economic, ethnic, and so on), social disorganisation and community cohesion. For the most part, the AQIR literature does not specifically address the broader conditions that promote radicalisation. The focus is on individual and situational determinants, rather than on macro-level (also called systemic) factors, with the exception perhaps of global media, notably the Internet. When the AQIR literature comes close to examining systemic factors, it is usually through the background characteristics of radicalised individuals.

For instance, Taarnby (2006, p:64) states that the members of the Glostrup cell "came from well-integrated families oriented towards achieving success in Danish society...[They] did not originate from the bottom of society but the top", implying that the men did not experience economic segregation. Jordan *et al.* (2008, p:20) observe similarly that "social marginalization is not a key indicator" of involvement in radical violence (in their sample), since the Spanish terror networks they studied were composed both of socially integrated and marginalised individuals. They conclude that "social politics ... cannot alone prevent the emergence" of Jihadist networks "among first, second, and third generation Muslim immigrants". At least some of the cell members showed no outward signs of social marginalisation.

That the influence of systemic processes is not readily observable in individual backgrounds should not, however, be taken as evidence that these processes play no part in the radicalisation process. Systemic processes are not immediate causes of radicalisation (much less terrorism). They set up the conditions that are favourable (or unfavourable) to the radicalisation process. They are the 'causes of the causes' of radicalisation (and the 'causes of the causes of the causes' of terrorism, see Figure 4, p 21). These processes may not be directly 'reflected' in the background attributes of radicalised individuals (although some of them may be).

Perhaps a more fruitful way of conceptualising the role of systemic factors in AQIR is their influence on the *pattern of emergence* of radicalising settings. Settings that promote terrorism are not evenly distributed through space and time. Some streets, some neighbourhoods, some communities, some countries have more, sometimes *much* more, of these kinds of settings than others, at particular times. To explain radicalisation, *it is necessary to explain why some environments are more supportive of terrorism sometimes* compared with other environments.

Residential segregation

Patterns of *residential segregation* may explain the concentration of particular kinds of settings in a given urban area. Precht (2007, p:45) does suggest that ethnic concentration may facilitate the emergence of "parallel societies", where "minorities are not part of the major values of society" and fail to integrate. Single-minded exposure to these closed "ideological sanctuaries" (Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p:22) could facilitate polarisation (Olsen, 2009) – a situation where the values of the people living in that isolated community and that of the larger society no longer match. Such enclaves may be more likely to exhibit tolerance for extremist subcultures (Silber and Bhatt, 2007).

Genkin and Gutfraind's (2008) simulated model of cell formation suggests that radicalisation is more likely to occur under conditions of low diversity and low immigration, pointing to the negative effect of ethnic segregation and concentration. To date, the evidence that would support any of these contentions is, however, extremely poor.

Collective efficacy

Systemic factors, which affect the way places are monitored (that is, the extent to which behaviour is regulated and sanctioned by agents of social control) or how much cooperation there is between these informal (for example, local residents) and formal (for example, police) agents, may also affect the radicalisation process. Settings where monitoring is weak (where radicalising practices are not discouraged) facilitate radicalisation; hence, factors and processes that contribute to the emergence of such settings would (indirectly) facilitate radicalisation.

Among these factors are neighbourhood and community social disorganisation, and the associated notion of *collective efficacy.* Collective efficacy can be defined as **"**the shared beliefs in a neighbourhood's capability for action to achieve an intended effect, coupled with an active sense of engagement on the part of residents" (Sampson, 2004, p:108). Broadly speaking, it is a kind of collective agency, the basis of a community's power to achieve its collective goals.

Collective efficacy relies on social interaction and trust between community residents, including representatives of the state. It is notable then that lack of trust is a theme in those AQIR studies that do consider community context. As one of Neumann and Rogers' (2007, p:50) interlocutors observes, tight-knit communities said to be at risk of radicalisation are keen to police themselves to "preserve [their] good name", but because community leaders are "scared of the 'foreign state'" and do not want to involve the authorities, the problem ends up simply being displaced. Without cooperation, action cannot be coordinated. This diminishing trust in social institutions leads to "a sense of helplessness" (*ibid*.). The community no longer believes that it can handle its own problems and may "become passive when faced with the rise of extremist groups".

Generational dynamics

Other factors could impact the lack of working trust between community residents, and their ability to regulate the socialisation practices that take place in the community. The AQIR literature

suggests, for example, that the *intergenerational gap* between Muslim youths and their parents' generation has resulted in a breakdown in social cohesion. The youths' attachment to political, cultural, social, and economic institutions has been weakened, because too many of these institutions are "geared towards the needs of the older generation" (Neumann and Rogers, 2007, p:49), rather than the youths' own needs and aspirations.

For Precht (2007), young Muslims who are at risk of radicalisation are torn between their parents' values and that of the secular country of their birth. Neither relatives, nor school, nor religious authorities can help them address these issues. They can only discuss these feelings of alienation with peers, outside of traditional social settings — away from the supervision of the rest of the community. Between these 'alienated' youths, and the expatriates representative of a global network of Jihadists (Sageman, 2004), the emerging pattern is one of *acculturation* and *de-territorialisation*, creating spaces and networks outside of the mainstream culture and away from the supervision of traditional institutions of social control, where radicalising practices can arise and prosper unchallenged.

Of course, further up the causal chain, other systemic factors can be added to the explanation. To understand the emergence of these generational dynamics requires additional sociological and historical analysis. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this work, but it is important to point out where that level of understanding would come in within a multi-level explanation of AQIR.

The narrative format of Al Qa'ida's message may contribute to its spread; popular youth culture is often narrative-based.

Media

Lastly, factors that participate in the introduction of radicalising teachings in the environment will also play their part. The availability of *mass media* is perhaps the most frequently discussed. Given the ubiquity of media outlets in this day and age, some degree of exposure to conflicting moral teachings is unavoidable. Clearly, exposure to radical ideas is far from sufficient for radicalisation to occur, but (global) media can introduce competing values into new environments. Scholars consider the so-called 'Al-Qa'ida narrative' to be an important factor in AQIR. Media outlets, notably the Internet, provide the means through which this narrative is disseminated (Silber and Bhatt, 2007).

The very 'narrative' structure of the message may contribute to its spread, making it easy to convey through media; much of the content of popular youth culture is presented in a narrative format. 'Grievances' may play a bigger role as fodder for the narrative, than as the foundation of a political awakening properly speaking. That European hotspots of radicalisation are found in countries that did not support recent Middle Eastern conflicts (an often-cited source of grievance) could be taken as support for this hypothesis (Precht, 2007). So does the observation that some radicalised individuals are not well-versed in the arguments that underpin Al-Qa'ida's arguments, or hold "simplistic" views (Taarnby, 2006, p:62); they may be less sensitive to the theological and political

content of the message than to its form, tailored to appeal to young men's "desire for action" (Neumann and Rogers, 2007, p:54).

Here again, the analysis can be expanded by considering the factors and processes that influence the emergence of the message itself and the message's spread. At that level of analysis, one might want to understand, for instance, the historical and political factors involved in the emergence of Al Qa'ida; or the processes of norm promotion, which contribute to the emergence of competing moral contexts at the international level; or the factors that affect the movement of persons, since people are as good a vector as media to introduce new rules and values into an environment. An in-depth review of these factors is beyond the scope of this REA, since so little, if any, empirical evidence is available. A more theoretical examination of emergence factors relevant to AQIR will follow, when neighbouring problem areas are considered (see Section 5.3.3).

The factors and processes likely to contribute to the emergence of radicalising settings discussed so far are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3 Processes and factors contributing to the emergence of radicalising settings

	CHARACTERISTICS OF PROCESSES	POSSIBLE FACTORS
EMERGENCE	• Emergence processes are made up of systemic factors, which influence the presence (or absence) of radicalising settings in people's environments, that is: • Factors that explain how insufficiently-monitored settings promoting radicalising moral teachings emerge and are sustained. • Emergence processes are 'the causes of the causes' of radicalisation (i.e. indirect processes). • To understand emergence is to understand why some places (for example, streets, neighbourhoods, countries) have more radicalising settings than others, at particular times. • Emergence is the least studied and understood category of processes.	*Residential segregation* • Could account for concentration of certain kinds of settings in certain urban areas. • Ethnic concentration and segregation is said to facilitate 'ideological sanctuaries' and 'parallel societies'. *Collective efficacy (CE)* • Basis of a community's capability to achieve its goals. • Low CE can result in sense of helplessness when faced with problems. • Lack of trust in the state means communities do not want to involve formal authorities. *Generational dynamics* • Intergenerational gap between youths and parents can result in low social cohesion. • Weak attachment of youths to traditional institutions. • Spaces and networks emerge outside of the mainstream culture, where radicalising practices can go on unchallenged. *Media* • Mass media, including the Internet, provide vector of dissemination of the Al Qa'ida 'narrative'. • The form of the narrative (for example, action-orientation, simplistic guidance) may appeal as much to vulnerable individuals as its political or spiritual substance.

5. Neighbouring problem areas

Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR) and involvement in terrorism are human processes and events. They share aspects of other kinds of human activities. To study these other activities is, to some extent, to study aspects of the radicalisation process by proxy. This approach is fruitful when the topic of interest is difficult to investigate. Knowledge of shared processes may be more advanced in other areas and can potentially be transferred.

The project specification provided by the Home Office, Office for Security and Counter-terrorism (OSCT) identified a number neighbouring problem areas (NPAs) with the potential to provide insights into AQIR. The specified areas were *youth gangs*, *new religious movements* (NRMs)*,* and *violent radical activism* (narrowly defined as forms of political violence other than Al Qa'ida-inspired)*.* In this chapter, some similarities and differences between AQIR and these NPAs are discussed briefly, with an emphasis on conceptual similarity. An analytical synthesis based on a purposive literature search conducted in each of these areas is presented, which parallels the analysis of AQIR.

5.1 Transferability of knowledge

The NPAs identified in the project specification share a number of characteristics with AQIR, both in terms of the problems themselves and of the issues researchers have grappled with. There are also a number of differences, which can be just as instructive. However, what matters for the purpose of this project is that these problems share a conceptual basis.

5.1.1 Similarities between neighbouring problem areas

- Each problem area concerns a very small portion of the general population, though some (gangs) involve more individuals than others. Overall, the phenomena described are the fact of a small number of people.

- All the study areas struggle to varying degrees with the *specificity problem*. Many individuals possess the characteristics, or have been exposed to the conditions, linked with involvement in gangs, NRMs or violent radical groups, yet very few do get involved. Some areas (gangs) have had more success comparing joiners and non-joiners than others, but predictive models still produce a high number of false positives (Farrington, 2007).

- For the few individuals who do end up joining gangs, NRMs, or violent radical groups, the experience is, for the majority of them, *transitory*. For example, 69% of gang-joining youths followed by the Seattle Social Development Project belonged to the gang for one year or less, and only 0.8% remained with the gang for the maximum study period of five years (Hill *et al.*, 2001). This finding is consistent with other longitudinal studies of gang membership. Likewise, most people exit NRMs voluntarily after less than two years (Dawson, 2009). This

finding is replicated for politically-motivated hate-groups (Ezekiel, 1995). Involvement in unconventional organisations is, for most individuals, a temporary state of affairs.

- In all areas, the process of change (conversion, socialisation or radicalisation) takes place within the group, which may facilitate, though not *necessitate*, the production of violence down the road. The facilitating function of groups in the production of violence and the adoption of unconventional beliefs has long been documented (Asch, 1954).

- In all cases, *a 'profiling' approach has been unsuccessful*. Profiles that can reliably distinguish 'vulnerable' individuals from others have not been produced. Everywhere an understanding has been reached that no single factor can explain (or predict) involvement in these groups. Instead, involvement results from an accumulation of factors*.*

- In an effort to tackle the specificity problem, early attribute-based profiles have largely been discarded (or are being discarded) in favour of *process- or path-based approaches,* which model involvement as a pathway or funnelling process. Some of the process models produced are very similar across areas.

  For example, both Lofland and Stark's (1965) model of conversion and Silber and Bhatt's (2007) model of radicalisation characterise individuals as 'seekers' in search of a religious solution to the tensions or problems they are experiencing, who come into contact with an unconventional ideology at a 'turning point' or 'crossroad' in their lives, form affective attachments to fellow 'converts', sever former social bonds, and become increasingly involved in the group through repeated and intensive interaction with its members.

- The boundaries between areas are not precisely drawn. Some gang members are allegedly motivated by political ideologies and views (Coughlin and Venkatesh, 2003), while so-called 'third generation' gangs have evolved into organised groups with complex socio-political agendas (Sullivan, 2006). Racist youth groups, such as Skinheads, also subscribe to a political agenda, though police departments tend to treat them like any other gang (Blazak, 2001), while violent political street groups, like the left-wing Italian organisations of the 1960s and 1970s, have been described as "gang-like" in objectives and behaviours (della Porta ,2009, p:11).

5.1.2 Differences between neighbouring problem areas

- Not all of the groups studied within the different NPAs are involved in violence. Although a few NRMs have taken part in violent action — including self-directed violence in rare cases of mass suicide — most unconventional religious movements cohabit peacefully with the rest of society (Dawson, 2009). Involvement in an NRM can, in fact, result in positive social outcomes for individuals (Snow and Phillips, 1980). The same can be said of many radical social movements that engage in legitimate forms of protest. Gang involvement is consistently associated with delinquency and violence, but not all gang members engage in anti-social activities (Bendixen *et al*., 2006). Conversely, most of the people studied in the

AQIR literature have come to the attention of researchers specifically because they have engaged in illegal acts of violence.

- The activities of groups in some problem areas, including recruitment, take place more or less in the open, while occurring covertly in others. Although NRMs may seek out new members in public, even engaging in door-to-door proselytising, groups with a violent or otherwise antisocial agenda are more likely to act covertly. Some, like racist youth gangs, will straddle the overt/covert divide.

- While individuals who get involved in NRMs or radical social movements tend to lack a history of serious offending, most, though not all, of the youths who join gangs and antisocial youth groups have a history of delinquency or antisocial behaviour.

Not all of the problem areas involve violent behaviour, but the basic processes are the same.

5.2 Shared conceptual basis

Without overlooking these differences, the case can be made that the same basic processes operate in all the NPAs. In each case, individuals come to adopt unconventional rules of conduct, values and commitments in a group setting. It is true that the newly-acquired morality supports violence in some cases and not in others, but it does not follow that the *processes* themselves have to be different, only that their content is. *Similar processes of acquisition, but different rules being acquired, result in different outcomes.*

The argument in favour of a shared analytical basis is supported by the fact that the adoption of new rules and values is conceptualised similarly across NPAs. In the study of NRMs, *conversion* has been defined as "the process by which a person gives up [their] perspective or ordered view of the world for another" (Lofland and Stark, 1965, p:862). In the case of youth gangs, *socialisation* has been described as the internalisation of the gang's own norms, rules and values (Melde *et al.,* 2009). Bjørgo and Carlsson (2005, p:25) similarly sum up socialisation into neo-Nazi youth groups as the adoption of "a new community, with a world-view and value system completely at odds with mainstream society".

These concepts fit well with the definition of radicalisation as the process by which people acquire moral rules and values supportive of terrorism (a lasting moral change, or propensity change). As such, knowledge in these problem areas can be organised using Situational Action Theory (SAT), as it was in the area of AQIR.

The analytical synthesis is presented below.

5.3 Analytical synthesis of findings

In the following section, findings from the targeted literature search are summarised according to their contribution to an understanding of *individual vulnerability*, *exposure*, and *emergence* processes. In the next chapter, this analysis is brought together with the findings of the main AQIR Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA). Tentative conclusions are drawn.

5.3.1 Individual vulnerability to unconventional moral contexts

Phase of development

Like research into AQIR, research into all three NPAs shows that the individuals who get involved are predominantly young. Of course, this is to be expected for youth gangs, but even in that area the risk is not spread evenly across childhood and adolescence. The factors influencing the acquisition of a propensity for gang membership (closely related, if not identical, to a propensity for delinquency) will be found in the individual's early years, while vulnerable youths will be most at risk of gang involvement as they make the transition to high school (Hill *et al.,* 2001).

NRMs and violent radical movements also mainly attract young people. Wright and Piper (1986) argue that NRMs are essentially youth movements. Attention should be paid to the unique features of 'youth culture', and to the characteristics of adolescents and young people in the explanation of why people join NRMs. As members age within the group, the median age of members rises, but many will leave the group before or around middle age. Interestingly, organisations that demand less of an extreme or unconventional commitment from members appear to attract slightly older people, but it remains that NRMs have had the most success recruiting the young (Dawson, 2003).

Violent political activism seems to be mainly the domain of adolescents and young adults. As one of Alonso's (2006, p:191) interviewees puts it, "I was very, very interested in all types of IRA activities [...] but it was a young youthful thing". Della Porta (2009) observes that radical activism, violent or otherwise, is the domain of young people who fall into militancy with peers, as a group. Horgan (2005b) suggests that youth is a factor in people's predisposition to get involved with a terrorist organisation, either because young people are more "emotionally responsive" to the arguments of terrorist groups, or because organisations provide opportunities to individuals with few other responsibilities and commitments.

For Olesen (2009), the distinct age profile of activists can be explained by the *biographical* (McAdam, 1986) and *structural* (Snow, *et al.,* 1986) *availability* of the young. Youths are available to join high-risk movements because they experience fewer of the social constraints that would hold back full-grown adults. Klandermans and Oegema (1987) speak of "barriers to participation", such as responsibilities towards job and family, which raise the material and psychological cost of participation in organisations. These barriers can be overcome and are more likely to matter when an individual is considering membership to a clandestine group, rather than a mainstream organisation (Olesen, 2009), but youths will naturally face fewer of them. As a biosocial category, young people have the "luxury" to indulge their interest in "intrinsically meaningful" social causes and organisations (Wright and Piper, 1986, p:17), while adults have to contend with competing

commitments. To put it bluntly, youths are more likely to have nothing better to do than to follow their interests, compared with adults who are more likely to have 'mouths to feed'.

These findings suggest that people are most vulnerable to involvement in unconventional organisations during adolescence and young adulthood, at a time when they have gained more control over what they can do with themselves (that is, their agency has increased), but have not yet invested so much into society that committing themselves to a cause would require significant sacrifice (of time, money, social standing, and so on). It is also a time when most social activity occurs in groups of peers, and peer group influence is at its most salient. Vulnerability to AQIR and in other NPAs seems to occur at the same time in people's lives, for similar reasons.

Moral and cognitive vulnerability

Much like AQIR researchers, NPA scholars stress that the people who get involved in these groups do not suffer from serious pathologies, although a tendency towards depression (associated with religious conversion generally) has been linked to NRM conversion (Buxant *et al.,* 2007). Serious gang involvement has been associated with hyperactivity and antisocial tendencies (Hill *et al*., 1999), but by and large the people concerned are 'normal'.

The literature does point to predisposing factors, which are linked to morality and cognition. In his review of NRM studies, Dawson (2010, p:6) indicates that a weak commitment to a system of belief is characteristic of converts prior to conversion. They tend to be "unchurched" (Stark and Bainbridge 1980, p:1381), with no prior attachment to an organised faith. For Dawson (2010, p:8), "moral deprivation" is a key factor in why people join. In rare cases, this 'deprivation' may play an important role in the progression to violence.

By contrast, Dawson (*ibid*.) also suggests that joining an NRM can constitute "a continuation or even fulfilment of the social and moral ideals to which they [young people] were socialized, but which their parents failed to adequately embody". In other words, conversion may be an attempt to find a moral environment that fits moral values acquired earlier in life, given that the current environment fails to measure up to moral standards. Singer (1988, p:182) finds that converts to the Black Hebrew Nation "had internalized strong moralistic attitudes prior to their encounter with the group." These attitudes turned out to be at odds with the lifestyle they experienced in the US Combined with a disenchantment with mainstream religions, this led to an openness to the Messianic-nationalist ideas that were floating around the Black subculture at the time — ideas which found a strong echo in the Black Hebrew Nation's creed. There was correspondence between some aspects of the convert's worldview, for instance, a pre-existing belief in supernatural answers to earthly problems (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980), and the teachings of the NRM, which facilitate conversion.

This idea that conversion to an NRM occurs in the 'continuation' of previously held morals has parallels in studies of ethno-nationalist terrorist group membership. Alonso (2006) observes that the socialisation that facilitated radicalisation and eventual recruitment into groups such as ETA and the IRA began at a young age, in a moral context promoting a "culture of death" lauding sacrifice for the cause and legitimising the use of violence against dehumanised targets. Likewise, some of the Provisional IRA members interviewed by Horgan (2005b) grew up in a family environment often

lacking in political culture, but experienced gradual exposure to the agenda of the Republican movement and the ins-and-outs of the conflict at school and on the street, long before their first direct contact with the organisation. Finally, risk profiles for gang members often include such factors as parental pro-violent attitudes, antisocial behaviour of relatives and antisocial tendencies of peers (Hill *et al.*, 1999), suggesting that an early socialisation into antisocial values, not dissimilar to the values of delinquent groups, may predispose some youths to gang involvement.

On the cognitive side, some factors of individual vulnerability also emerge. NRM converts are described as less able to handle periods of transition "turning points" (Kox *et al.,* 1991). They have a greater need for *cognitive closure*—even when compared with committed members of mainstream religious traditions rather than with the general population. Buxant *et al.* (2007, p:32) see this as support for the idea that individuals turn to NRMs for "clear-cut answers, beliefs, practices and rules". The fact that most people drift out of NRMs after a limited time seems to suggest that this need for moral and cognitive bolstering may be transient.

This interpretation is echoed in the gang literature. Ethnographic studies of membership in racist gangs, which draw on the 'strain' tradition in sociology, see gang involvement as a kind of 'self-help' mechanism. Within the embrace of the group, the individual seeks relief from alienation and the stress caused by the experience of "normlessness" (Blazak, 2001) — the absence of a system of rules guiding their lives, taking the strain off day-to-day decision-making. Gang customs are adopted to shore up "marginal" identities (Esbensen, 2000, p:5).

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*Most people drift out after a short time, suggesting their
need for support from the group is temporary.*

Still, complete alignment between pre-existing values and the group's ideology is not a prerequisite of involvement (Bjørgo and Carlsson, 2005). Ethnographic research suggests that gang members continue to demonstrate attachment to mainstream norms and values alongside gang norms and values. 'Conversion' to the gang is not wholesale, although new action-relevant (for example, violence- and crime-supportive) rules are adopted, which influence the individual's moral perception and make them see violent action as a viable alternative in later situations.

Whether a continuing commitment to (some) conventional values is a factor in the length of involvement is unclear. It is plausible that individuals who hang on to conventional commitments leave the gang sooner than those who do not. The severity of social maladjustment, and antisocial behaviour in childhood and a history of violent delinquency, have been linked to long-lasting gang affiliation (Hill *et al.*, 2001; Thornberry *et al.*, 2003). Bendixen *et al.*'s (2006, p:109) study of selection effects on gang membership finds that at least some gang members appear to be "'different kinds' of people", with a greater tendency towards antisocial behaviour, which leads them to seek out

"others with a similar orientation".[19] Life within the group ends up facilitating the continuation of their rule-breaking and may exacerbate it.

Attachments and social bonds

Attachments that pre-date involvement in the unconventional group or organisation play different roles in different problem areas. In the context of radical activism, at least some pre-existing ties follow the individual into the group. To paraphrase della Porta (2009), friendship networks overlap with networks of political commitment. Once commitment to the activist group has crystallised, "some individuals acquire value and others lose value" (*ibid.*, P 17). As with AQIR, the nature of ties can be competitive and maintenance of pre-existing ties (with family, friends, and so on) is contingent upon common involvement in the organisation. Friends and relatives who are not sympathetic to the individual's new, all-consuming cause are discarded.

In the case of NRMs, joiners tend to have weak attachments or a problematic relationship with family, entailing weak social capital. Prior to conversion, many of them have few social contacts on which they can draw for support (Kox *et al.*, 1991; Buxant *et al.*, 2007). Some are "social isolates" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980, p:1380), deprived of a functioning social network, which they may have either lost or left behind by choice. Here, too, attachments can be competitive. The new ties forged with NRM members can either fill the absence of previous social ties (*ibid.*, 1980), or come at the expense of any remaining bonds to the outside world. In other words, attachments to non-group members can be "neutralised" (Singer, 1988), reinforcing the group's social isolation. Stark and Bainbridge (1980) suggest that when conversion "fails", it is because newcomers failed to form strong attachments to the members of the group.

Neutralisation, however, is not an inevitability. There is anecdotal evidence that pre-existing ties can survive conversion. Snow and Phillips (1980) find that joining an NRM can in fact result in a strengthening of outside ties, notably when conversion involves a focus on self-improvement, including improvement of the convert's relationships. Buxant *et al.* (2007) also find that NRM membership can have positive social effects. One hypothesis is that conversion to non-communal movements (movements that do not require their members to live on a commune) may be less of a strain on the individual's prior attachments than involvement in communal, "peculiarist" movements Snow and Philips, 1980). The latter is more likely to be accompanied by social stigma. In other instances, the strength of pre-existing attachments is one of the factors leading to the conversion. Stark and Bainbridge (1980) have documented cases of individuals being drawn into the Moonie commune out of loyalty to converts, despite overtly rejecting the Moon ideology. Some of them eventually adopted the group's values, after interacting with cult members for an extended period of time.

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[19] Given time constraints, it was not possible to include a targeted review of the literature on delinquency, but research suggests that predictors of involvement in delinquency and violence do not differ markedly from predictors of gang involvement (Hill *et al.*, 2001). As Howell (1998b, p302, also cited in Bjørgo and Carlsson, 2005) puts it, "separate causal pathways to gang participation versus non-gang serious and violent offending have not been identified". A thorough review of the literature on selection versus facilitation and enhancement effects of gang membership on involvement in delinquency is beyond the scope of this report. For a review and discussion, see Thornberry *et al.*, (2003).

Research on youth gangs suggests that the strength, or lack thereof, of pre-existing attachments matters less than the kind of socialisation (conventional or unconventional) supported by these bonds. Hill *et al.* (1999) find that, contrary to expectations, weak parental attachment is not a predictor of gang membership. However, they report that sibling antisocial behaviour and parental pro-violent attitudes *are* predictors, in which case strong parental attachment may in fact be a risk factor. If the child is strongly attached to a parent who holds antisocial values, the child is likely to internalise these values. The (negative) influence of the parental attachment may be strengthened by the child's weak attachment to their school, given that weak commitment to a school is also a predictor of gang membership. The socialising influence of the school cannot counter the influence of antisocial sources of attachment if the child feels no attachment to the institution. Beyond school and family influence, the "overarching influence of [antisocial] peers", is the strongest predictor of antisocial behaviour and gang membership (Esbensen, 2000, p:5). This is taken to suggest that early parental supervision — managing the child's exposure to their environment, first and foremost peer groups — is an important factor in the child's vulnerability, or resilience, to gang involvement.

At first, the picture with so-called "White gangs" (that is, Skinheads) may seem somewhat different, with vulnerable youths depicted as friendless (Bjørgo and Carlsson, 2005) — therefore not socialised into the gang by peers — but here again, a key factor seems to be a deficit of parental management (supervision) of the adolescent's exposure to the environment, and a lack of attachment to conventional social networks and institutions, which might compensate. The youths are described as loners whose relationship with their parents is at best "troubled", their caregivers being "obviously too busy with their own careers to show their children sufficient attention" (*ibid.*, p:8).

Life experience and personal preferences

Process models of conversion to NRMs tend to closely parallel process models of AQIR.[20] They, too, give prominence to the role of life events, 'crises' or 'turning points', in precipitating the "radical departure" (Levine, 1984) of conversion. These events are depicted as a source of stress to a person who has neither the moral, cognitive or social recourses to cope, 'pushing' them into the arms of the NRM. For some of them, this will occur after a period of religious 'seeking'.

The literature accords to say that, from the perspective of the actor, pretty much any life event can constitute a turning point. Furthermore, any experience that preceded the conversion may gain disproportional significance in retrospect (Snow and Philips, 1980). For Dawson (2010, p:8), the trouble has been "brewing for some time" and getting involved in the NRM is "almost coincidental", whether or not a crisis occurred. In the context of terrorism, Horgan (2005b) cautions against the "real risk" of overstating "the significance of presumed catalyst events", taking at face-value the terrorists' own accounts.

Given that pretty much any experience can constitute a 'turning point' from the perspective of the actor, it is, once again, more fruitful to look for general processes rather than concentrate on the seemingly unending diversity of these 'events'. As stated earlier, life experiences can be interpreted as some of the main factors in shaping people's wants and desires. It is not the 'turning point' in

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[20] Compare and contrast Lofland and Stark (1965) and Silber and Bhatt (2007).

itself that matters, so much as its potential to affect people's preference for one type of environment over another, or to affect people's lifestyle in a way that exposes them to new environments.

If, as the NRM literature suggests, people experience moral or social 'deprivations', they may develop a preference for places that can provide them with the things they feel they lack — such as spiritual stimulation, companionship, or other sources of cognitive and social support — until "look[ing] for solutions [alone] is no longer necessary" (Kox *et al.*, 1991, p:238).

Not that the life experience in question has to forcefully drive home the existence of some deprivation or problem to play a part. An event as seemingly trivial as a "change of employment or educational status" (Singer, 1988, p:184) figures prominently among the turning points preceding conversion. The potential for 'cognitive opening' aside, this kind of life event is likely to trigger significant changes in a person's environment (their activity field), bringing them into contact with new settings and new sources of moral influence.

> *The psychological effect of a 'turning point' may not matter as much as the potential to impact someone's lifestyle in a way that exposes them to new environments and new socialising practices.*

The same logic applies to terrorists and gang members. Experiences of personal or vicarious victimisation (della Porta, 1995; Horgan, 2005b; Melde *et al.,* 2009) — at the hands of the police or security services, or at the hands of community residents, peers or family — have been linked to involvement with a radical group. As with prison inmates joining gangs or people experiencing 'moral shocks' (Section 4.1.4), it is possible to imagine that experiences of victimisation will trigger a preference for settings where an individual feels safe or empowered (for example, places where likeminded people gather) where they can share their feelings of anger and helplessness with a sympathetic audience (for example, student forums) chancing exposure to violence-promoting influence in the process.

As for the kind of socialisation process undergone by ethno-nationalist terrorists, it is also likely to involve preference-formative experiences. Individuals repeatedly go through events (for example, popular marches or demonstrations) that associate the promotion of violence with positive (personal and vicarious) emotions — such as communion, excitement, power over oneself, or social glorification. Attraction to the positive side of the experience means repeated exposure to the violence-promoting features of these settings.

5.3.2 Exposure to unconventional settings

At first glance, the NPA literature pays little attention to the environment in which socialisation (into gangs, NRMs or radical groups) takes place. There is no equivalent to AQIR magnets (Section 4.2). Nevertheless, knowledge is available, if not on the 'kinds of places' in which socialisation occurs, then on the moral, social or affective characteristics of the settings in which it occurs. Particular attention is paid to social selection. As with AQIR, social networks are among the key factors explaining exposure to unconventional settings.

Social selection

Mobilisation and recruitment are perhaps some of the better studied aspects of social movements, including radical groups. Explanations tend to privilege the role of social networks. Previous contact with a member of the organisation is "the most important factor explaining an individual's recruitment" (Jasper and Poulsen, 1995). Put another way, counting a member of an organisation in one's social network is a factor of vulnerability for recruitment to that organisation.

The NRM literature suggests that a "networked" approach to recruitment is linked to a movement's capacity for growth (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980). Organisations that target 'social isolates' do not grow as fast as movements that attract socially-connected candidates. Once activated, social networks act as "conveyor belts" for conversion (Singer, 1988). The literature on racist youth gangs, suggests that these groups are aware of the strategic value of activating existing networks for the purpose of recruitment. Gangs will target priority schools where Skinheads or younger siblings of skinheads can be used as first contacts (Blazak, 2001). The activation of personal networks may be the only recruitment mechanism available to high-risk activist movements, which cannot recruit openly (Olesen, 2009). "Strong confidence ties" are required, often in the guise of friendship or kinship ties (della Porta, 1992a:9; della Porta, 1995) — though it might be noted that, according to Wiktorowicz (2004, p:13), reliance on "personalism and informality" will limit the expansion of a movement in the end.

Conversion, religious or otherwise, is for many people the process of "coming to accept the opinions of one's friends" (Lofland and Stark, 1965, p:871) or one's relatives (Horgan, 2005b). Few choices are individual in themselves; radicalisation and recruitment to militant and underground organisations are most often the fact of small groups rooted in intimate ties and shared experience who 'convert' together, from "high-school collectives" to "squatted youth centres" (della Porta, 2009, p:16).

Although social networking is a key factor of social selection in these NPAs, it is not the only one. As was the case with AQIR (Section 4.2.2), ethnicity or membership of a religious or cultural group can influence people's selection into certain settings, such as a particular church, cultural organisation, or ethnocentric group (Singer, 1988). This social selection mechanism could work in tandem with self-selection – for example, if experiences of discrimination lead an individual to prefer ethnically or socially homogeneous settings (*ibid*.).

Selection factors often occur together. Social networks are often made up of people who share background characteristics, such as age, culture or ethnicity. It may not be possible to say whether

someone was exposed to a given environment because of their social connections or because of their cultural affiliation. These factors are likely to be entangled.

Place of residence is another factor of social selection. It is most frequently mentioned in gang membership studies. The place where people are raised and live determines the type of neighbourhood to which they are exposed. That environment will have a great influence, notably on their early development. Community characteristics (for example, social disorganisation), presence of cultural norms supportive of gang behaviour, and, of course, the presence of gangs in the neighbourhood are all features associated with increased risk of gang involvement (Howell, 1998a). In short, some neighbourhoods carry a greater risk of exposure to crime-supportive settings than others. Blazak (2001) reports that neo-Nazi groups are keen to recruit in 'problem' neighbourhoods experiencing economic difficulties, blanketing them with leaflets. As mentioned previously, they also target specific schools. To be a pupil in a neighbourhood with a heavy neo-Nazi presence is to be at greater risk of exposure compared with a pupil elsewhere.

Though the matter is not directly addressed by the literature, it is plausible that place of residence will also play a selective role in other problem areas. It is possible to imagine, for example, that people are more likely to come into contact with a member of a NRM if they reside in a large urban centre on the West Coast of the US, than in a small town in a rural state. And, although it might go without saying, people are more likely to be exposed to moral contexts supportive of the IRA if they live in certain parts of Northern Ireland, rather than elsewhere.

Finally, factors such as professional occupation and socio-economic position will also affect social selection. Students will be naturally exposed to what Olesen (2009, p:16) calls "social settings with a dense organizational and institutional structure", in which activism is "likely to occur faster", such as a university. Today, these "dense settings" are likely to include networking sites and emailing lists. Because, as an occupation, studying involves "expendable time" (Wright and Piper, 1986, p:17), students may devote quite a bit of time to social activities that will bring them into contact with organisations within that structure. As past and present experience continuously shapes future preference, they may find themselves becoming politically active and developing a taste for the positive aspects of political involvement (such as excitement, social support or prestige). They may continue to seek out these kinds of settings and form new social networks, some of which may include members of radical organisations, leading to exposure to radical influence, and so on.

Self-selection

Personal preferences figure prominently in the NPA literature (usually as factors 'motivating' involvement in a movement or group).[21] Some categories of preferences show up across problem areas. For instance, everyone is said to want social prestige or social status, from Skinheads (Bjørgo

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[21] The concept of motivation is pervasive but poorly defined throughout the NPA literature, despite Horgan's (2005b, p:98) observation that "questions about motivation (or the 'why' questions) in terms of understanding involvement [...] are essentially unanswerable". Preference is a more analytically useful concept, as far as understanding how people come to acquire the propensity for any moral action, including terrorism. It also allows researchers to work around the "unanswerable" 'why' questions.

and Carlsson, 2005), to gang members (Klein, 1995, also cited in Wood and Alleyne, 2010), to ethno-nationalist terrorists (Alonso, 2006), to NRM converts (Dawson, 2003).

Thrill-seeking is also involved nearly across the board, often associated with youth. In the words of an IRA member, "[T]he motivation [was that] I was young. When you are young there is an excitement to it [...] somebody has given me a gun, this is great" (Alonso, 2006, p:191). For Bjørgo and Carlsson (2005, p:22), people who end up quitting early are those who failed to experience the "alluring activities" they thought would come with membership, and left "to search for something more exciting".

A desire for protection springing from experiences of victimisation seems common among gang members and members of White supremacist groups. Paradoxically, gang membership has been found to increase victimisation in real terms. Yet members' fear of victimisation tends to decrease significantly compared with non-members, which suggests that it is the *perception* of protection and safety — the gang's "emotional protection" — that individuals value (Melde *et al.*, 2009, p:588).

Because socialisation is a gradual process, preferences formed at any stage of an individual's involvement with the group or movement may lead to further self-selection. Such a process could in part explain the difference between 'drifters', who leave the movement quickly, and the 'joiners', who stay. These kinds of preferences might be found under the headings of 'incentives' or 'inducements' for group membership, such as excitement, affective rewarding, social support, shared cultural interests, a safe environment in which to be preoccupied with oneself, and so on. Bjørgo and Carlsson (2005, p:25) speak of young activists who "used to be against violence", but after repeated violent confrontations acquired a taste for "tak[ing] out all [their] aggression" on opponents, including the police, even coming to "enjoy it". Members of tight-knit groups who have grown accustomed to the affective and social support of fellow members may no longer want to do without this rewarding "brotherhood".

The preferences that people acquire through life experience will be part of what draws them in and *holds them in* long enough for attachments to form and for socialisation practices to operate.

Unconventional settings

Earlier in this chapter, it was argued that the NPAs under review share the same general processes (Section 5.2). However, they differ in terms of the *content* conveyed by these processes. While in all areas the key socialisation mechanisms are the same, the content of the rules people internalise differs significantly. This difference has an impact on the type of settings in which socialisation takes place. Monitoring, in particular, will be an issue in some cases more than others.

An organisation that promotes terrorism and other forms of illegal action carries out its socialising practices where authorities won't become aware of it (unmonitored settings), while an organisation that promotes perhaps unconventional but not illegal or (by the standards of the broader moral context) immoral actions has more freedom to seek members out in the open. In other words, the *content* of a group's moral teachings affects the kinds of settings in which these teachings can be aired and socialisation of new members can happen.

Violence- or crime-promoting socialisation takes place in settings free of (conventional) supervision. Hill *et al.*, (1999) find that some of the strongest community predictors of gang membership are the proportion of youths in trouble in the neighbourhood and the availability of marijuana. Taken together, these indicators suggest that gang membership is linked to the availability of unsupervised settings (where marijuana can be sold), where youths with a weak conventional morality can associate and get involved in antisocial activities away from anyone who would try to intervene.

For groups that start out in the open, a move towards unmonitored "underground" settings often accompanies a gradual progression towards violent action (della Porta, 2009). S*ocial encapsulation*, the process by which groups close themselves up to counter-socialising influences, is at work in all NPAs. The group or movement begins to serve as a substitute family (or real family, in the case of community-supported violence), and remaining ties are cut off, sometimes from the outside.[22] Charismatic leaders — gurus, father figures, role models, authorities with real or "bogus titles" (Blazak, 2001, p:995) — become the main, or even the only, source of moral authority over the individual. Socialisation into the moral framework of the group continues behind closed doors.

When the group's teachings and the rules promoted by the moral context correspond, socialisation can occur openly.

In other contexts, violence-supportive socialising practices can take place in the open (or the semi-open). This will occur in settings where formal and informal authorities lack the resources to regulate behaviour, or where they tolerate or sympathise with the violence-supportive moral teachings. If there is no discrepancy (*a lack of correspondence*) between the moral teachings of the group or organisation and the moral context of the setting in which the group or organisation operates, then whether or not the setting is monitored becomes irrelevant. If both the group and the local authorities agree, then the group can air its views freely.

Perhaps the best illustration of this situation is ethno-nationalist terrorism where the local community is, at least to some extent, supportive of the violence. The influence of informal monitoring (by friends, relatives, teachers, and so on) will be weak,[23] since in this scenario everyone more or less agrees with the values of the group. The community's moral context may even discourage moral teachings that are not supportive of violence. The sources of attachments that

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[22] As a young neo-Nazi puts it, "[P]arents [...] cut off their children because they become nationalists. Then they cut off all connections and possibilities as well! [...] we do not get any kind of correction from our surroundings. In the past, when I had an opinion, *I could discuss it with people who disagreed with me*. [...] I have read the novel *Lord of the Flies* [...]. Things go completely wrong, ending up in total barbarism. We are like them — *isolated and with no one to correct us*" (quoted in Bjørgo and Carlsson 2005, p:25; emphasis added).
[23] *Formal* monitoring, of the kind carried out by occupying security forces, will still be relevant, though presumably less effective without the cooperation of the local community.

deliver violence-supportive moral teachings may even be found within traditional institutions, such as the family, school, and church.

This configuration is typical of a situation where community-based terrorist violence is a regular occurrence, rather than a rare event. For violence to be sustained, *the broader moral context has to be supportive of it.*[24] This is reportedly the case in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where community and families come to support people's involvement in violent activity (Post *et al*., 2003), or in Northern Ireland where "your parents, and the priest at the altar, and your teacher are saying 'These men are good men. They are fighting a just thing here', it filters down quickly that these people are important and whatever they say must be right" (an interviewee in Burgess *et al*., 2005, reproduced in Horgan, 2005b). In this kind of context, legitimate authorities, not just underground organisations, play a major role in the conversion and sustained commitment to activism (Olesen, 2009).

For those groups whose rules are not unconventional or 'deviant' (running strongly counter to conventional morality), the availability of unmonitored or sympathetic settings is likely to be irrelevant. Dawson (2003) notes that non-communal, less demanding NRMs are more likely to recruit new members in public settings compared with communal, 'particularistic' groups, which tend to operate through pre-existing social bonds and in more private settings.

Interestingly, Jasper and Poulsen's (1995) study of (peaceful) animal rights and anti-nuclear protesters suggests that a majority of activists 'self-recruited' after exposure to the movement's public rhetoric, without the need for active recruitment or intimate social bonds (that is, sources of attachment). According to the authors, the movement's moral teachings were already well aligned with these individuals' pre-existing moral values and emotions, including a previous commitment to animal welfare and accompanying feelings of guilt for not doing enough to protect animals. People exposed themselves to the moral teachings of the movement because they already shared important values. This suggests that successful socialisation can take place in the absence of strong personal attachments (for example, through media exposure only), to the extent that the values of the organisation do not conflict with the individual's pre-existing morality.

The point is (perhaps) obvious; what differentiates violent from non-violent groups or organisations are not the socialising processes (moral teaching, monitoring, caring) at work within them, but rather the content of *some* of the moral rules they promote. The literature suggests that social encapsulation and the "intensive interaction" (Lofland and Stark, 1965, p:874), "affective focusing" or "cognitive closure" (della Porta, 2009, pp:13 – 14) that go with it do not, by themselves, produce a violence-supportive moral change in people, though they may accelerate the process.[25] Certainly, many NRMs could be described as 'encapsulated', but few ever act violently. This, added to the fact that groups that do engage in violence, like many youth gangs, would not be considered 'encapsulated', suggests that the violence-supportive rules that govern the group account for "the elevated level of violence" (Howell, 1998a, p:9), as much as the nature of the setting (a group) in

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[24] War and insurgency are examples of situations where the moral context has been altered on a large scale. Sustainable peace can only be achieved once the moral context has been 'returned to normal'. This will be harder to do in cases where formal and informal institutions of social control have broken down (as in civil war) or when conflict has gone on for a long time and the violence-supportive morality has become habitual.

[25] As a young female activist puts it, "It is remarkable how fast I have shifted my boundaries regarding violence" (Bjørgo and Carlsson, 2005, p:25).

which the socialisation takes place. As Howell (*ibid*.; emphasis added) puts it, the "*willingness to use violence* is a key characteristic distinguishing gangs from other adolescent peer groups".

A key difference between violent and non-violent groups, then, is in the content of *some of* the moral rules they promote. It is worth keeping in mind that violence-supportive moral rules may be promoted alongside socially-acceptable values, or emerge out of a socially-acceptable framework. Discussing radical activism, della Porta (2009, p:24) notes that "the legitimization of violence within social movements always starts as legitimization of a defensive form of violence". Even the most radical moral breaks are initially grounded in mainstream morality, to a lesser or greater extent. It 'grounding' in conventional ideas and values could be one of the aspects that distinguishes the unconventional moral teachings that 'take' (with some people) from those that do not. The social movement literature certainly suggests as much (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008). The nature of this grounding, or 'framing', will be addressed in the next section.

Writing about NRMs, Dawson (2010) states that three ingredients are necessary for a cult to escalate towards violence: social encapsulation; attachment to a charismatic leader; and apocalyptic or world-rejecting beliefs. This last point suggests that the form violence-supportive moral teachings take — that of a dynamic, categorical, transcendental (moral) narrative — may be an important ingredient in the success of violence-supportive socialising practices.

It remains to understand the conditions that bring about the *emergence* of these violence-promoting moral contexts, including the factors that affect the production and transmission of narratives that promote violence-supportive values and rules.

5.3.3 Emergence of unconventional settings

As previously stated, processes of emergence are not well understood. To say the least, empirical evidence is scarce and the following discussion draws heavily from theoretical discussions. Some of the key concepts employed by NPA scholars (notably '*frames*') do not seem to have been operationalised in a systematic way. However, these analytical constructs may still be of use given the underdeveloped understanding of emergence generally. Other key categories of factors linked to emergence are community-level factors, such as *collective efficacy* and *opportunity closure*. These are addressed first.

Collective efficacy

Gang research has produced several community-level predictors of gang involvement, many of which could affect the emergence of criminogenic settings in the environment of adolescents. For example, gang membership has been linked to: the presence of community norms supportive of antisocial behaviour; extreme poverty; high mobility rates; and disorganised neighbourhoods (Hill *et al.,* 1999). As discussed in the previous chapter (Section 4.3.1), factors and mechanisms that affect a community's *collective efficacy* will impact the community's capacity to supervise its young, and so impact the emergence (or suppression) of settings that promote and support moral rule-breaking.

But the picture is not clear cut. It would be wrong to say that a community with a high level of collective efficacy and community cohesion necessarily discourages the emergence of violence-supportive moral contexts. Once again, the *content* of the moral context will bring about different outcomes, although the processes involved are the same.

Support for community cohesion can have different effects in different contexts; a nuanced understanding is required.

In some instances, community collective efficacy and community cohesion can facilitate or even sustain an antisocial moral context and by extension contribute to the development of antisocial propensities in its members. This is the case when the values of the group and the community coincide, as in the example of ethno-centric terrorism discussed earlier. Bjørgo and Carlsson (2005, p:1) suggest that a local community (or some segment of it) can behave favourably towards groups that align with some of its interests and values, such as racist youth groups who "turn their violence and aggression towards unpopular foreigners". Communities can come to perceive these groups as serving a social control function, as when a gang is seen as "keeping streets safe", in which case the community may start to support the gang's presence (Wood and Alleyne, 2010).

Measures that support community cohesion are seen favourably in crime prevention, but as these examples indicate, their success will depend on the specifics of the community's moral context. A nuanced understanding of causal processes is required, because the same processes can have different effects in one context or another, relative to one problem or another. For example, Olesen (2009, p:21) suggests that measures meant to encourage the development of a healthy, decentralised civil society, densely packed with civil organisations, may produce an environment rich in "contact surfaces" for activists; in other words, such measures may unwittingly contribute to the emergence of settings of unconventional socialisation (including radicalising settings) if implemented without thought to context.[26]

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[26] A similar example in crime prevention might be measures that encourage provisions for sporting activities for young people. Implemented without heed for contextual mechanisms, these measures could end up providing youths with unsupervised settings in which they associate and possibly expose each other to antisocial influence.

Opportunity closure

Other community-structural factors are associated with the various problem areas, notably with youth gangs.[27] Some of them have been taken to indicate a link between gang formation or membership and social deprivation and economic exclusion, more precisely *the closure of legitimate opportunities* (Fisher *et al.*, 2009). However, the mechanisms that tie these meso- and macro-level factors to the acquisition of a propensity for moral rule-breaking have been little examined. Furthermore, gangs have been known to emerge in relatively affluent settings, for example, middle-class neighbourhoods (Wood and Alleyne, 2010), where economic opportunity closure would be less of an issue at first glance.

Nevertheless, explanations based on opportunity closure also find favour in other areas, notably the study of radical social movements. Here, the emphasis is on the closing of political opportunities as a product of a society's level of *access to opportunities*, as well as the level of *state repression* (Olesen, 2009).

The first factor, access to opportunities, is the degree to which state institutions are opened to civil society. Centralised systems provide fewer points of access to citizens than decentralised systems; therefore, fewer political opportunities. Della Porta (2009) remarks that processes that affect access to opportunities can take root far beyond the borders of the nation state. Access to political opportunities (or lack thereof) in one part of the world influences the actions of individuals in another. The effect of opportunity closure is entangled with the effect of other systemic factors, such as migration and media globalisation.

The second factor, state repression, refers to the state's level of acceptance of activism. Access to political opportunities is affected by the nature and extent of state policing and surveillance of its citizens' political activity.

Della Porta (1992a; 1992b; 1995; 2009), who has studied extensively the emergence of violent 'repertoires' for action, draws attention to the dynamic role that escalating street conflict between activist groups and the police plays in the production of political violence. In other words, the state's repressive activity impacts on the emergence of criminogenic (radicalising) settings. Demonstrations that involve confrontation with the police attract so-called fringe elements among activists, creating a setting where other protesters are exposed to antisocial influence (as in the case of the young activist interviewed in Olsen, 2009). Researchers have documented the role of confrontation with the police in providing a moral context favourable to youth gang socialisation. Confrontations foster group cohesion (Bjørgo and Carlsson, 2005) and may even lead to the formation of the gang in the first place by creating a need for protection among youths (Melde *et al.*, 2009).

State repression and surveillance can also contribute to the emergence of problematic settings by driving activists 'underground'. Underground settings provide an environment that is not only insulated from formal (state) deterrence mechanisms, but isolated from the mainstream community and therefore from informal deterrence mechanisms, creating spaces where individuals are less likely to be exposed to competing (for example, counter-radicalising) influence from friends, relatives, and other institutions.

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[27] Most of the factors identified in gang research are linked to delinquency in general.

As Bjørgo and Carlsson (2005) have shown, social exclusion only compounds the situation for members of racist youth groups branded as neo-Nazis. Informal repression manifesting as social stigma has much the same effect as state repression, closing off youths from people and institutions that could challenge their unconventional mindsets and counter the influence of the gang's moral teachings (see footnote 24, p 62 in this report). Once again, general processes must be considered in context for their role to be understood. It is possible to see how (through which mechanisms) a process intended to deter undesirable behaviour makes the emergence of settings that support that behaviour possible.

According to della Porta (2009), one of the factors that will most affect whether opportunity closure results in the production of violence is the presence of higher moral authorities, which legitimise the fight. Using the example of Italy, she describes how the Catholic Church was instrumental in legitimising certain forms of violence. These forms of actions presented as "defensive" were re-valued and suddenly perceived as "right". As della Porta (*ibid.*, p:13) puts it, "the choice of violence is a normative choice". Rules are produced that set out what is right or wrong in the pursuit of the organisation's goals. To the extent that rules that validate the use of violence are produced and promoted, a violence-supportive moral context emerges.

When moral rules that validate the use of violence are promoted, a violence-supportive moral context emerges.

Another factor that contributes to the emergence of violence-supportive moral contexts is the competition between actors within the same social movement over the support of their shared audience.[28] Groups try to 'one-up' each other by demonstrating their superior commitment to the cause with evermore violent action. Yet even in a competitive situation, della Porta contends that, all other structural factors (opportunity closure, legitimising authorities) being equal, there will still be social movements that are more or less vulnerable to violent radicalisation than others. For movements such as the global justice movement, whose experience has led them to "distrust certain forms of violence", normative preconceptions make the progression to violence unlikely (*ibid.*, p:23). This implies that a movement's (and its members') attachment to non-violent values has a protective effect against exposure to the environment's violence-promoting features.

Ultimately, what della Porta's observations suggest is that characteristics that have to do with content or *meaning* (ideas, beliefs, values) play a part alongside characteristics that have to do with *structure* (for example, community cohesion, access to economic and political opportunity) in the emergence of criminogenic settings.

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[28] Bloom (2005) described the role played by this competitive process in the production of suicidal violence in the Palestinian territories.

Frames, media and narratives

Given the key role of exposure in the acquisition of unconventional or criminogenic propensities, understanding how organisations and groups disseminate their beliefs and ideas, and how values propagate and shape the moral context in which people develop, is paramount. For scholars of social movements, the concept of *frame* is central to that understanding (della Porta, 2009; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008). A frame is defined as a "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974). Broadly speaking, frames are templates that people use to make sense of an event or fact in a social reality where multiple interpretations of the same event are available, and will sometimes compete. *Framing* is the process of giving meaning to an event or part of social reality, often by reifying or simplifying aspects of it. In the context of social movements, framing occurs through the construction and negotiation of shared meaning among actors (Snow and Benford, 1988). The process is dynamic.

The framing process has various functions, notably: to identify what the problem is and who is responsible (*diagnosis*); to offer solutions (*prognosis*); and to motivate people to join up and get involved (*motivation*) — for example, by telling people that *they* are the victims of a particular injustice, it should concern *them*, and *they* should be the ones to do something about it. Movements try to frame problems and solutions in ways that connect with an intended audience by reaching out to their pre-existing values, experiences and feelings. The success of the framing exercise will depend on the coherency of the message: how convincing it is and how authoritative the source; how many other frames compete to make sense of the same issue or event (with different interpretations of what is going on, who is to blame and what is the remedy); how compatible the message is with "the broader cultural context"; and how high is the cost of getting involved (della Porta, 1992a cited in Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008, p:6).

> *Narratives shape the moral context in which people develop*
> *and acquire propensities for particular kinds of action.*

With regard to compatibility, framing theory suggests that the success of a movement's message — its ability to mobilise an intended audience — is linked to the movement's ability to frame that message in a way that taps into "master frames" or "interpretative packages" that are already present at a structural level in a society (Olesen, 2009). These packages are made up of 'reservoirs' of values and norms, which exist at a shared cultural level and into which the organisation will attempt to 'anchor' its frame, using appropriate symbols, language and imagery. For example, Singer (1988) attributes the success of the Black Hebrew Nation as a religious movement in a large part to its ability to connect its 'solution' (migration to Israel) to a pool of existing Messianic-nationalist sentiment among the disaffected Black community. With regard to the role of authoritative sources in spreading a group's message to its audience, Blazak (2001) described how "racist, sexist, and homophobic" quotes from well-known figures outside the White supremacist movement were mixed in with the group's message to give bigotry the aura of legitimacy.

If the frame's content — its ability to plug into existing pools of sentiment — matters, so does its form and the means through which it spreads. *Media* provide increasingly diversified means of transmitting a group's message to an audience. Racist groups communicate their 'diagnosis' of the 'problem' as well as their 'solution' through self-managed outlets, such as websites, White Power rock CDs, concerts and other platforms attractive to adolescents (Bjørgo and Carlsson, 2005). As to form, the construction and transmission of norms and values, and of "repertoires of action", takes on an important symbolic and "narrative" dimension (della Porta, 2009, pp:10,16). Groups use narrative devices to, among other things, "bend [...] concepts or broader ideologies" to legitimise their choices (*ibid*.). These narratives or stories become features of the settings (including media) that shape the moral context in which people develop and acquire their propensities for particular kinds of action.

Today, frames and narratives circulate and compete in a "global information space" (Olesen, 2009, p:25), which, thanks in large part to the Internet, connects millions of individuals across borders. On this subject, Olesen (2009) makes two remarks that merit reporting here. The first is that the Internet provides the means for antisocial organisations to propagate their frames and images while bypassing the "temporising" filter of traditional media. The message is transmitted raw, without a layer of (temporising or unsympathetic) interpretation. The second remark is that organisations and movements that draw successfully from "global symbols" to construct their message will generate "universalised" frames that transcend "borders and socio-cultural differences" (*ibid*., p:27). Olesen contends that the radical Islamic movement has succeeded in producing such a universalised frame by connecting abstract notions of a Muslim community (*ummah*) and of an "irreconcilable conflict between the West and the Muslim world" to concrete situations and events and to their prescribed "remedy".

Given the prominence of narratives in the transmission of unconventional moral rules, greater attention needs to be paid to the process of their emergence. The idea that they are constructed and transmitted in ways that appeal specifically to the young warrants further investigation. However, going back to the observation that AQIR concerns a small minority of individuals (at least in a Western context), any analysis should account for the limited reach of the 'Al Qa'ida narrative' and associated moral teachings.

One hypothesis might be that the great majority of people (including the majority of young people) are not sensitive to exposure to these narratives. They are simply not vulnerable to them. Another might be that the local context is not favourable to the emergence of the radicalising moral contexts transmitting these narratives. In other words, few people are ever exposed. A third hypothesis could be a mixture of both. In any case, there is as much to learn from asking why radicalisation *does not* happen, as from asking why it does. The analytical literature on framing would suggest that the Al Qa'ida narrative has failed to spread more widely because it has failed to connect with broad reservoirs of norms and values in Western societies, including in Western Muslim communities. That conjecture warrants further analysis and empirical examination.

6. Conclusions

If this Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) has one overarching conclusion, it is that the evidence-base, whether on the causes of Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation (AQIR) or on the causes of neighbouring problem areas (NPAs), is scientifically weak. Even in areas where research has benefited from greater methodological sophistication, such as gang studies, a significant number of so-called risk and protective factors have been identified, but few explanatory models have been produced. Without explanations, it is difficult to know what knowledge to prioritise and how to design effective prevention programmes.

In this final chapter, main findings are synthesised and tentative conclusions and recommendations are outlined. It must be reiterated that these conclusions are only as strong as the evidence-base from which they are drawn, and that they are best seen as rational conjectures about the causal processes at play in radicalisation. What is offered are reasoned hypotheses, which can be used to organise the knowledge-base, design further research, and assess present and future prevention strategies.

Brief observations about the quality of the research on AQIR are followed by a summary of main findings across NPAs. A discussion of the need for a scientific framework to inform prevention strategies concludes the chapter.

6.1 The evidence-base is weak, but the foundation for a knowledge-base exists

- *Weakness of the evidence-base.* As the outcome of the methodological assessment of AQIR studies demonstrates (Chapter 2), **research on the causes of AQIR is still largely exploratory rather than explanatory** (hypothesis-testing). The evidence-base it has produced is scientifically weak. This is understandable, given the practical and methodological difficulties associated with empirical research on radicalisation and terrorism. However, **the problem has been compounded by a lack of theoretical frameworks linking levels of explanation** (individual, ecological, systemic) to outcomes (radicalisation) **by way of explicit mechanisms**.

- *Foundation for a knowledge-base.* That is not to say that there is no knowledge-base. The case was made that there are fundamental conceptual similarities between AQIR and other NPAs where individuals adopt unconventional rules of conduct (relative to the broader moral context) and break moral rules. Knowledge in these areas, notably theoretical frameworks that postulate clear causal mechanisms, can be transferred to AQIR. Specifically, a well-developed and well-supported general theory of moral action, such as Situational Action Theory (SAT), can be used as the foundation of a knowledge-base on AQIR in particular, and on radicalisation in general.[29]

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[29] For an up-to-date picture of the growing body of empirical work surrounding SAT, visit the website of the Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study [PADS+] at: http://www.pads.ac.uk.

6.2 Al Qa'ida Influenced Radicalisation and neighbouring problems are outcomes of the same basic processes

- *Key processes.* The same basic processes are at work in the acquisition of unconventional, often violence-supportive, moral frameworks in all the problem areas. In AQIR as in the NPAs, **the key categories of causal factors are those that impact on people's vulnerability to radicalising moral contexts, their exposure to radicalising settings, and in the emergence of these radicalising settings.**

- *Tackling the 'specificity problem'.* These processes interact in the overall process of radicalisation. To acquire a propensity for terrorism, people have to become exposed to terrorism-supportive moral contexts (**exposure**). For them to be exposed, settings with terrorism-supportive moral contexts have to be present in their environment (**emergence**), and they have to come into regular contact with these settings (**vulnerability to selection**). For radicalisation to result from exposure, individuals have to be sensitive to the influence of the terrorism-supportive features of the settings they come into regular contact with (**vulnerability to moral change**).

  To focus on the interconnection of these processes is to begin to tackle the **problem of specificity**. It may become possible to explain why AQIR affects very few people in certain contexts (for example, in Western societies), despite the fact that many appear to be vulnerable. Figure 6 illustrates how key causal factors and processes interact in a 'funnelling' process of radicalisation. As knowledge of each of these key categories of processes grows, so does the ability to explain specific manifestations across contexts. Faced with a large population deemed 'vulnerable', an analysis of the exposure and emergence factors in its environment can begin to explain why few have been radicalised.

  The problem of specificity cannot be addressed at the level of individual vulnerability alone. The characteristics involved in individual vulnerability are general and shared across problem areas. This is especially the case when moral and cognitive vulnerability are considered.

- *Same structure, different content.* Although key processes are shared across problem areas, outcomes differ because the *content* of the processes differ. In some cases, the moral rules acquired are supportive of violent acts, and in others they are not. Processes of AQIR and processes of conversion to a non-violent religious movement are structurally similar but differ in terms of their content (the action-relevant rules and values internalised by the individual) and so they have different outcomes (acquisition of a propensity for violence in the former case; acquisition of some other, non-violent propensity in the latter).

- *The limits of transferability.* Because content has an impact on the way key processes will manifest in context, **how specific factors operate differs between problem areas.** An organisation promoting rules and values at odds with the local moral context is likely to seek out new members in so-called underground settings (especially if the actions promoted are illegal). Meanwhile, an organisation with rules and values that correspond broadly to the local moral context will be free to contact new members in the open.

Figure 6 Summarising the radicalisation process
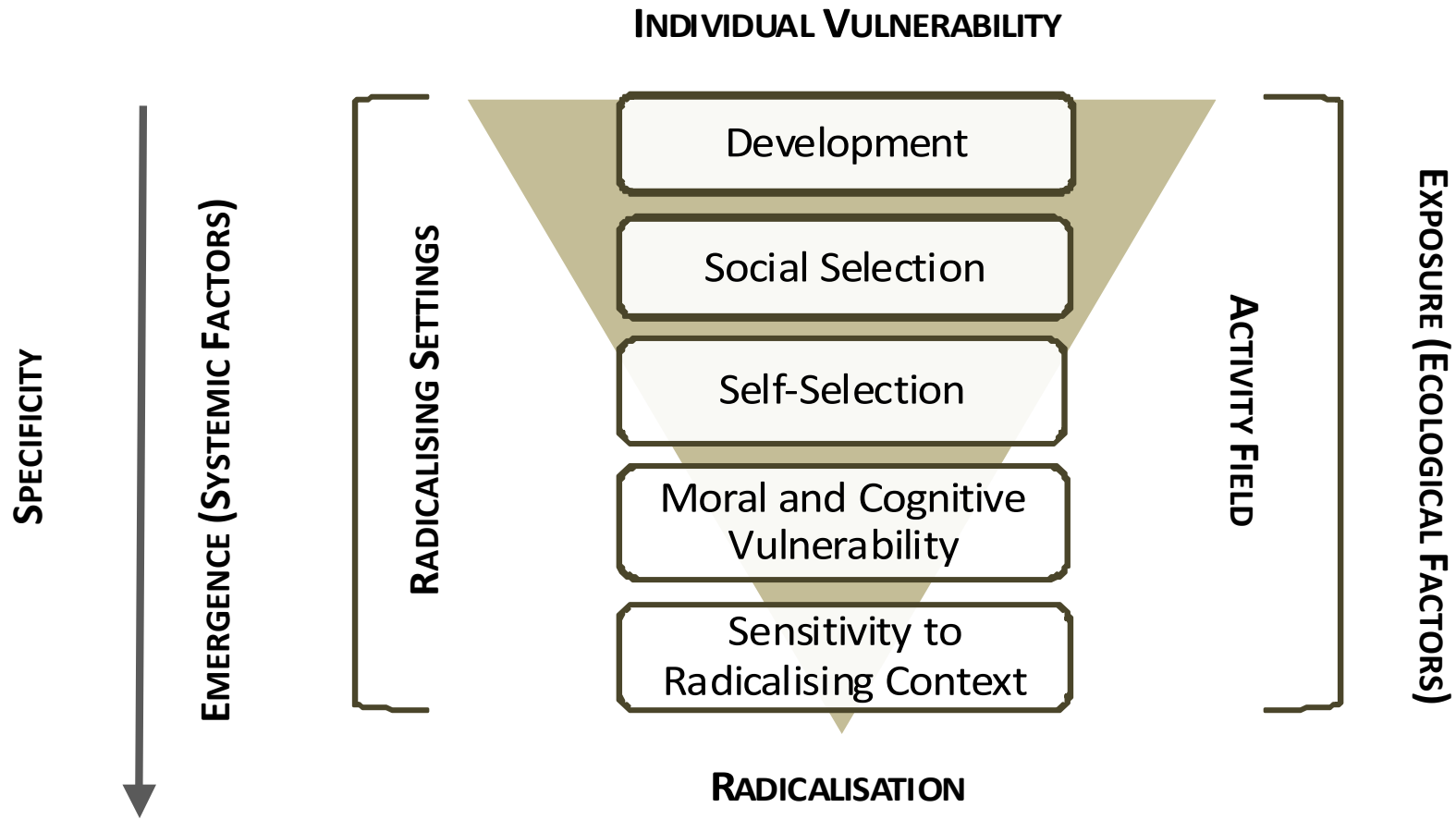
In both cases, the general process of exposure is at play, but to understand the *specific kinds of settings* in which exposure takes place in either of these examples, the nature or content of the rules being promoted by these respective organisations has to be taken into account. What this means for an understanding of radicalisation is that learning about the kinds of settings in which radicalisation happens in one context may not necessarily provide information about the kinds of settings in which it would happen in another. The relationship between structure and content matters.

6.3 There are no vulnerability 'profiles', although there are factors of vulnerability

- *There are no 'profiles' of individuals vulnerable to AQIR*. As expected, research reveals no distinctive 'vulnerability profile' to radicalisation, to help predict who is at risk of radicalisation without generating an unmanageable number of false positives. Some patterns of attributes or characteristics observed in the background of radicalised individuals may, however, be **markers** (see glossary p 6), indicative of the processes at work in AQIR. This is notably the case with age.

- *A common 'attribute' across problem areas: youth.* Though there are exceptions, AQIR and NPAs concern **mainly young people**. For AQIR, the bracket is **roughly 15 to 35 years of age**. Adolescence and young adulthood are **periods of transitions** characterised by factors that affect a person's likelihood of exposure to radicalising settings, such as a greater independence from parents and other authorities, the predominance of the peer group as the main setting of socialisation, and a widening of the activity field resulting in exposure to new environments, including new social networks, all of which take place against a background of biological maturation (for example, brain development). When full-grown adults are involved, they seem to have undergone transitional experiences with similar effects on their lives (for example, migration), leading to **contact with new social settings and a disconnection from prior networks of support**.

- *General moral and cognitive vulnerability*. To be vulnerable to radicalisation is to be sensitive to the influence of radicalising moral contexts. Individual vulnerability is described in the same terms across problem areas. No specific factors seem to distinguish moral and cognitive vulnerability to radicalisation from vulnerability to conversion to a New Religious Movement (NRM). Cognitive vulnerability manifests as an **inability to cope with stress or challenging situations**. Moral vulnerability is described as a **weak commitment to conventional moral rules and values (weak moral rule-guidance)**, or as the **undermining of a prior commitment to moral rules and values**.

  There is a strong suggestion across problem areas that **commitment to a conventional (for example, crime-averse) moral framework renders people less susceptible**, if not immune, **to the influence of settings of unconventional socialisation** (including radicalising settings). Conversely, **a weak commitment to a conventional moral framework renders them vulnerable** to that influence.

- *Life history as source of vulnerability.* Across problem areas, an unspecified, but seemingly sizable, proportion of subjects have experienced a 'turning point' or simply an 'event' that contributed to their moral and/or cognitive vulnerability to radicalisation (or conversion or involvement). Because what makes a 'turning point' is subjective and retrospective, **any life event** (from the loss of a job to the wrongful death of a loved one) **can constitute a 'turning point'.** Furthermore, not all subjects experience that kind of event. This is also the case with 'grievances' stemming from experiences of 'moral shock' or 'humiliation by proxy', or from personal experiences with political or economic frustration. Grievances can derive from any number of happenings, subjectively defined.
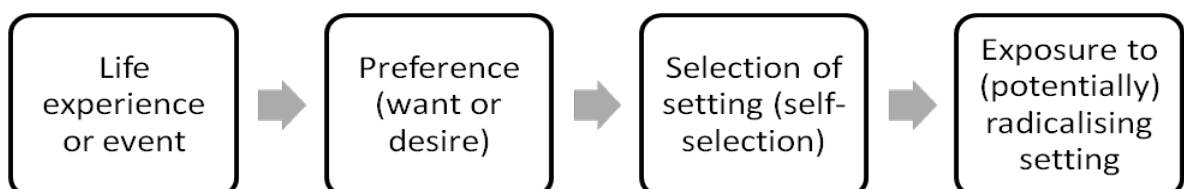
6.4 To understand selection is to understand exposure to radicalising settings

- *People become exposed to radicalising settings through self-selection.* Selection is the key mechanism linking individual vulnerability to exposure. The generic nature of 'turning points' and 'grievances', and the fact that not all radicalised individuals experience them while a great many people who do never radicalise, means that these factors are poor predictors of radicalisation. They can be more productively understood as **experiences that shape people's preferences (their wants and desires)**, **and lead them to spend time in particular settings** (for example, places where they feel safe, where they can find companionship or moral support, where they can 'air grievances' to a sympathetic audience).

  In a few cases, the settings people select to spend time in will have radicalising features and exposure will ensue. If exposure is repeated, and if people are sensitive to these features (in other words, vulnerable to moral change), radicalisation can occur (Figure 7).

  This process of setting selection based on preferences (known as **self-selection**) is continuous. As people get exposed to radicalising settings, they can develop a preference for some of the characteristics of these settings (such as the companionship, the thrill, the social support they offer), consolidating their selection of radicalising settings as time goes on. They will start the process in a coffee shop and end up in a foreign training camp for would-be mujahedin.

Figure 7 The process of self-selection into radicalising settings

Life experience or event → Preference (want or desire) → Selection of setting (self-selection) → Exposure to (potentially) radicalising setting

- *Social selection sets the stage for self-selection.* The selection of settings based on preference and other personal factors occurs within the limits set by **social selection**. People are more likely to find themselves in certain kinds of places according to the (social, cultural, economic, residential) categories to which they belong. If one of these kinds of places happens to contain a radicalising setting, the people more likely to find themselves in these places will also be more likely to be exposed to radicalising influence.

  Who is at risk of exposure (and who will be radicalised) is determined by the location of radicalising settings. Changes in the distribution of radicalising settings will be reflected in changes in the social-demographic background of radicalised individuals.[30]

  Processes of **social selection can explain why radicalised individuals have diverse socio-demographic or socio-economic characteristics;** their background will be, in part, determined by the characteristics of the radicalising settings found in the environment**. If settings that promote new religious ideologies are found mostly in large, affluent urban centres, then NRM members are likely to be (vulnerable) people from an affluent urban background. If settings that promote violent radical activism are mainly found on university campuses or in student forums, then members of radical groups are more likely to be (vulnerable) students. If settings that promote Al Qa'ida-inspired terrorism are found in environments frequented mainly by Muslims, then radicalised individuals are more likely to be found among (vulnerable) Muslims.

- *The role of social networks.* **Membership of a social network containing one or more radicalised member**, or containing a member connected in some way to one or more radicalising setting, is one of the main factors linked to exposure to radicalising influence. Networks based on friendship or kinship ties play a predominant role, since attachment is a key factor in the internalisation of new (including terrorism-supportive) moral rules. As the NRM literature puts it, to convert is often to take on the beliefs of people who are (or have become) friends.

To better understand why certain kinds of people (rather than other kinds) become exposed to terrorism-promoting moral contexts and acquire a propensity for terrorism, **it is necessary to understand how the settings that promote terrorism come to be found in people's environment in the first place**. This is the problem of emergence.

6.5 Emergence is key, but poorly understood

- *Radicalising settings.* Radicalising settings are characterised by the following features (Figure 8):

  - **socialising practices, notably moral teachings, which support terrorist violence**;

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[30] It is possible to see how variations in the distribution of radicalising settings across contexts could, at an individual level of analysis, produce an array of 'risk factors', which fail to coalesce into one coherent 'profile' (for example, individuals of different ethnicity or age group are involved in different cells or 'campaigns'). Yet the underlying process (social selection) would be the same.

o   **a lack of effective monitoring of the behaviours that go on in the setting**; and

o   **opportunities for attachments to radicalising agents**, be they peers, recruiters, or moral authority figures (for example, 'spiritual sanctioners').

These radicalising features are found in places ranging from 'neutral' settings (for example, sports club) to so-called radicalisation magnets (for example, religious study groups*). **Neutral settings can expose individuals to radicalising influence in an incidental way**; what attracts people to the setting in the first place are not its radicalising features, but some other aspect or activity.

That **the Internet does not appear to play a significant role in AQIR** might be surprising, given that it is the social networking medium par excellence and can display many of the features characteristic of radicalising settings. However, the fact that the technology presents obstacles to the formation of intimate bonds could explain this counter-intuitive finding, in view of the prominent role of personal attachments to socialising agents.

**Figure 8 Characteristics of radicalising settings**
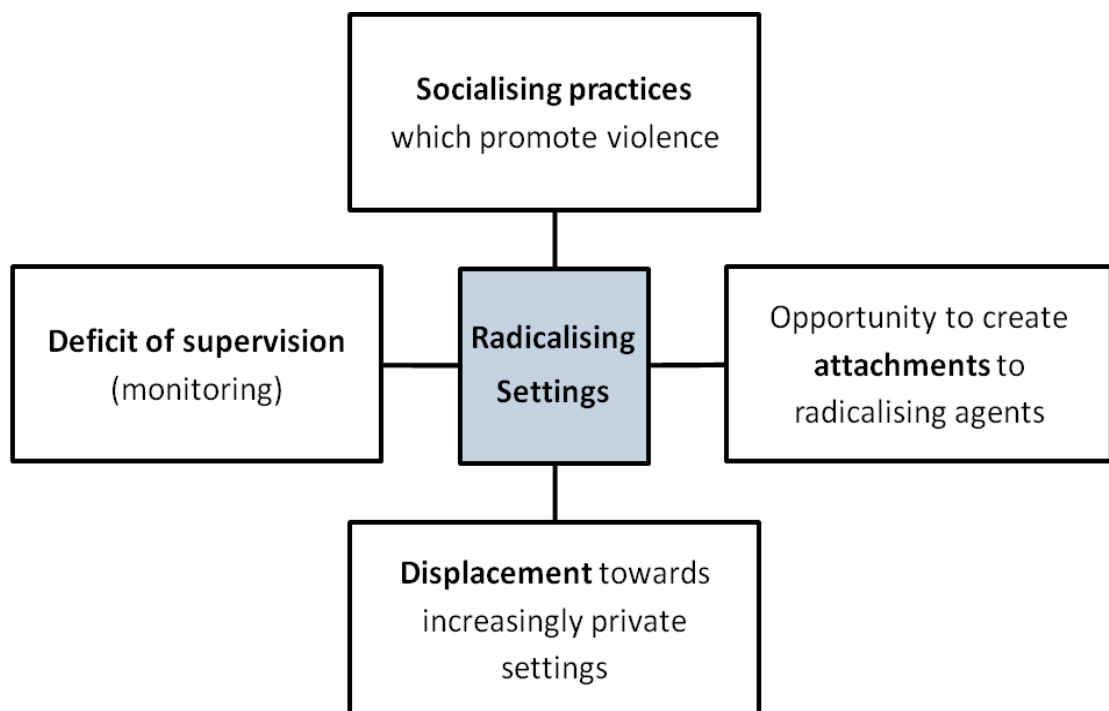
- *Factors of emergence of radicalising settings (the 'causes of the causes' of radicalisation).* An explanation of radicalisation must consider the factors that account for the presence of radicalising settings in a given context. These are found at meso - and macro - levels of explanation, from the neighbourhood level to the global level. At present, the understanding of emergence is underdeveloped. Research on gangs and delinquency more generally points

to the contribution of **community-level factors**, such as **low levels of collective efficacy and community cohesion**, in creating an environment favourable to the emergence of criminogenic settings. Other factors include **residential segregation** and **intergenerational gaps**, which contribute to the creation of spaces isolated from mainstream society (spaces where radicalising practices may not be challenged). The social movement literature further stresses the role of economic, social and political opportunity closure in the emergence of violent repertoires of action. As a vector that facilitates the introduction of new moral values and ideas into local contexts, **media** also play their part.

- *Violence-supportive narratives*. Both AQIR studies and the NPA literature stress the role of narratives in the dissemination and transmission of violence-supportive rules and values. **These narratives,** which contribute to the emergence of violence-supportive moral contexts**, are characterised as: transcendental, moral; simplistic, categorical; authoritative; and action-oriented** (Figure 9). In other words, they are about the 'meaning of life' and big ideas, which they make personal by offering straightforward prescriptions for action. They also appeal to individuals' need for rule-guidance and social support by handing them a role to play alongside others in a larger story. This way of conveying terrorism-supportive moral teachings could hold a special appeal for young people, especially vulnerable ones. There are implications for the way counter-narratives are designed and communicated and counter-radicalisation measures rolled out.

Figure 9 Characteristics of radicalising narratives
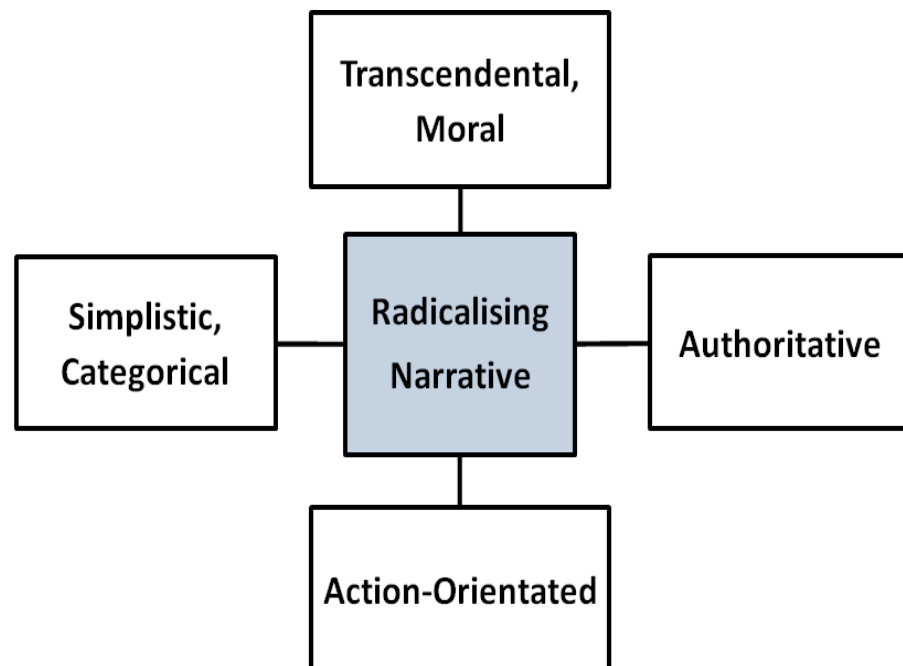
It may be worth trying to understand how far, if at all, terrorism-supportive narratives have penetrated a given context. Social movement scholarship suggests that the lack of

'compatibility' between a narrative and the broader moral context will limit the extent to which networks can be activated and new members mobilised. Mobilisation generated by an extremist narrative will remain small as long as mainstream social values are incompatible with its message. However, the concepts developed by social movement theory need to be further analysed and operationalised before their contribution to the knowledge-base can be fully assessed.

6.6 A scientific framework is needed to inform prevention strategies

- *The usefulness of general frameworks.* Traditionally, models of the causes of terrorism and radicalisation have been local, instead of general.[31] They have provided accounts of specific types of terrorism in specific places (for example, Palestinian radicalisation; Irish Republican terrorism). One limitation of local explanations is that they risk being outdated when a new 'type' of terrorist violence or a new 'mode' of radicalisation appears**.** Taken together, local models may give the impression that a near infinite variety of motives, events, settings or 'pathways' are implicated in the radicalisation process. It is not immediately obvious what knowledge to use, or how to use it, when new manifestations of the problem appear (for example, when 'institutional' modes of radicalisation appear to be supplanted by 'cell-based' or so-called 'self-radicalisation').

  The framework presented in this report is general. It abstracts key categories of mechanisms from the diversity of observations and explains the development of different kinds of propensities (for example, for terrorist violence, delinquency) using the same basic processes. Out of the seemingly irreducible complexity of the facts, it attempts to identify what matters. **The purpose of a general framework such as SAT is to direct attention to where the causes of the problem are likely to be found, in order to design interventions**. In terms of expanding the knowledge-base, a general framework will also direct attention to what knowledge in any number of domains can contribute to the understanding of radicalisation and its prevention.

- *Explanations are general, but problems are local.* Scientific knowledge is by nature general. However, **context needs to be taken into account when designing measures against specific problems**. As seen in the discussion of collective efficacy, community cohesion can, in one context, hamper radicalisation, and in another (for example, community-supported ethno-nationalist terrorism) facilitate it. The mechanisms involved (community monitoring of youth; community influence on the moral context generally) are the same, but the outcome is different in each context. In the first instance, measures to reinforce community cohesion may help to prevent radicalisation; in the second, they may have the unintended effect of supporting it.

  The purpose of a general scientific framework is to direct attention to which features of the local context are likely to matter, how they are likely to matter, and how they might be manipulated to change the outcome in the desired way. Once interventions have been

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[31] See Bouhana and Wikström (2008) for a fuller discussion of this point.

designed and implemented they can be evaluated, and the *evidence-base* regarding what works in preventing radicalisation can start to grow.

• *When thinking intervention, think mechanisms.* The above suggests that it is possible to have some idea of the likely effectiveness of an intervention before it is implemented. **If it is not possible to clearly identify *how* (through which mechanism[s]) an intervention would affect the final outcome (prevent the radicalisation of individuals), that intervention is unlikely to succeed**. The first step in the design of any intervention must be to clearly identify what causal element of the radicalisation process is being targeted (which of the factors and processes illustrated in Figure 6 p 71) and how it is to be disrupted.

Furthermore, because the framework presented here looks at how different levels of explanations are linked, it can help to establish the possible consequences of an intervention before it has been implemented—such as how, in some contexts, measures to reinforce behaviour monitoring could displace radicalising activity elsewhere.

• *A systematic research agenda.* As this REA makes clear, the understanding of AQIR is underdeveloped. Historically, terrorism scholars set out to identify individual attributes associated with radicalisation in order to predict who was at risk. Because no patterns of associations were found, at a time when a 'new' form of terrorism was emerging, some advocated that individual vulnerability was better forgotten. The focus should be instead on studying the workings of 'cells' (Atran, 2006). In other words, the focus should be on understanding exposure.

Yet rather than rule out any category of processes outright, the authors argue for the **need to increase knowledge of all three levels of explanation, including emergence**. The so-called 'franchising' terrorist model embodied by Al Qa'ida in recent years is, if anything, in the business of facilitating and sustaining the widespread emergence of radicalising contexts. Yet radicalising settings are not found everywhere. **Some environments are more hospitable to the emergence of radicalising settings than others**.

By and large, UK communities have proven resistant to the emergence of AQIR settings and to radicalisation generally. Understanding why is paramount, in order to address the current problem and be ready to transfer that knowledge to the next one.

An ambitious, systematic research programme into the interconnected processes of individual vulnerability (to moral change and to selection), exposure to radicalising settings (through self- and social selection), and emergence of contexts favourable to radicalisation needs to be pursued.

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APPENDIX A: Studies retained for final inclusion (Main Rapid Evidence Assessment)

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APPENDIX B: Search terms selection strategy (Main Rapid Evidence Assessment)

The selection of search terms was broad. A list of terms was submitted to the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) users for review to ensure that all areas of interest were covered.

Wildcards (?, *) were used to pick up foreign spellings (for example, radicali?ation) and derivations of key words (for example, motiv*). Some databases did not allow wildcards, in which case all variations of the keyword were spelled out.

The search terms were combined using a Boolean search string (Figure 10). When a database interface set a limit on the number of search terms allowed, the search procedure was iterated and duplicates filtered out.

Figure 10 Boolean search string

radicali?ation **|** deradicali?ation **|** radical* **|** extrem* **|** fanatic*
violen* **|** terror* **|** militant **|** believer **|** martyr*

AND

al qaida **|** al qa'eda **|** al qaeda **|** al qa'ida **|** jihad*
islam* **|** salafi **|** muslim

AND

factor **|** mechanism **|** cause **|** motiv* **|** determinant* **|** propensity
prevent* **|** trigger* **|** antecedent **|** pathway **|** process **|** indicator
predict* **|** resistance **|** susceptib* **|** roots **|** causal **|** explanation
framework **|** context* **|** rehabilitat* **|** disengage* **|** vulnerab* **|** risk*
resilien*

APPENDIX C: Electronic search databases (Main Rapid Evidence Assessment)

The researchers expected that a significant proportion of the relevant literature would not be peer-reviewed and that this material was likely to be found through World Wide Web searches, rather than through academic databases. However, given the highly sensitive search string, Google returned an unmanageable number of hits, most of which were unsuitable for the project's purposes. As a compromise, GoogleScholar was used.

Where possible, results were imported into EndNote. Otherwise, the database's native interface was used to sift through abstracts.

The following databases were searched:

AnthropologyPlus

Arts and Humanities Citations Index (ISI)

Conference Proceedings Citations Index (ISI)

Dissertations and Theses

EconLit (OvidSS)

Electronic Theses Online Service (EThOS)

FRANCIS

GEOBASE (via OvidSP)

GoogleScholar

IBSS

PsychINFO (via OvidSP)

PUBMed

JSTOR

NBER Working Papers

Science Citations Index Expanded (ISI)

SCOPUS

Social Policy and Practice (via OvidSP)

Social Science Citations Index (ISI)

Urbandoc

APPENDIX D: Search Hits by Database (AQIR REA)

Database	Raw search hits	First screening
JSTOR	9,507	10
AnthropologyPlus	8	0
Dissertations and Theses	47	1
FRANCIS	180	5
EconLit	74	1
EThOS	1	1
GEOBASE	328	12
GoogleScholar	25,500 (**933**)[1]	187[2]
IBSS	945	42
ISI Web of Science[3]	534	35
PsychINFO	2,119	44
PUBMed	1,550	12
NBER Working Papers	26	0
SCOPUS	282	32
Social Policy and Practice	48	13
Urbadoc	0	0
Cross-Referencing	n/a	34
Total	**16,582**[4]	**429**[5]

[1] Number of full records returned by GoogleScholar within set limits (French and English language, patents excluded).

[2] Abstract information was not always available through GoogleScholar. When in doubt, the paper was downloaded and reviewed in its entirety, hence the somewhat inflated number. GoogleScholar did prove to be the most productive database, as it sources both academic and non-academic material.

[3] Includes: Social Science Citations Index, Science Citations Index Expanded, Arts and Humanities Citations Index, and Conference Proceedings Citations Index.

[4] Does not exclude duplicate records.

[5] Excludes duplicate records.

APPENDIX E: Records screening procedure (Main Rapid Evidence Assessment)

The raw search returned **16,582** records (including duplicates), which were downloaded into EndNote. The records were put through an iterative screening process.

Each record's abstract was reviewed individually. If an abstract was unavailable and the paper could not be deemed irrelevant based on title alone, the document was sourced in full.

The first screening procedure kept to a liberal approach. All records that made reference to or hinted at research into radicalisation in the context of Al Qa'ida or Al Qa'ida-influenced violence were retained, regardless of theoretical framework, epistemological stance, methodological quality or study population.

After this first screening procedure was applied, **395** unique documents remained and were accessed in full. The documents were scanned for references to other studies and a further **34** documents of possible relevance were identified. Out of this pool of **429** documents, **15** (3.5%) could not be accessed in the time available.

Thus **414** documents remained, which were put through a second screening procedure. Taking guidance from Lum *et al.* (2006), these 414 documents were narrowed down to those studies of Al Qa'ida and Al Qa'ida-influenced radicalisation that used scientific methods. However, once a better picture of the quality of the available literature had been gathered, and after consultation with the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) users, the second screening criterion was 'simplified' to *any mention of empirical research using some form of primary data*.

Papers reporting second-hand study results were rejected, as they systematically lacked sufficient methodological information. Several documents mentioned the outcome of evaluations of counter-radicalisation or de-radicalisation initiatives taking place abroad, but did not give enough detail and did not refer to any primary database or document of reference. Therefore, they were rejected.

The definition of *primary data* was kept quite loose, to include mentions of dedicated databases created by systematically collecting news reports, as well as interviews with key informants. When two documents reported on the same study (for example, in an unpublished report, then a peer-reviewed article), the document containing the most detailed methodological information was retained, unless different kinds of analysis were performed using the same data set.

After the second screening **55** documents remained (see Appendix A), including books, articles, research briefs and reports that satisfied the minimum criterion and reported on some form of radicalisation study using primary data. These numbers are broadly congruent with those reported by Lum *et al.* (2006) in their Campbell Collaboration systematic review of counterterrorism interventions.

The remaining 55 documents were put through quality assessment (see Appendix F).

APPENDIX F: Quality assessment strategy and design of the quality assessment tool (Main Rapid Evidence Assessment)

One way to assess study quality is to consider whether the study's research design is appropriate for the type of research question. As a first step, guidelines as to the type of research design appropriate to address questions of the type Q1a and Q1b were elaborated.

Predictive studies should include:

- the correlation of time-ordered (or time invariant) variables; and
- a random sample of the relevant population (or a study of the relevant population).

Explanatory studies should include:

- the correlation of time-ordered (or time invariant) variables that include key explanatory concepts matched up to a strong theory; and
- a random sample of relevant population (or a study of the relevant population); or
- an experimental design (manipulation), a natural experiment, or a simulation.

Criteria for study assessment also include:

- clarity of research question;
- data quality;
- measurement quality;
- relevance to the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) question(s).

Quality assessment tool

Several quality assessment tools (QATs) have been designed for use in REAs and systematic reviews. QATs are often intended for use with particular types of studies (for example, Sherman *et al.*'s [1997] Scientific Methods' Scale, for programme evaluations) or particular methodologies (for example, Glasgow University's Critical Skills Appraisal Program [CASP] questionnaire, for qualitative studies). In prior REAs, questionnaires have been combined to create custom appraisal tools; for example, combining CASP with the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-Ordinating Centre (EPPI's) Weight of Evidence questionnaire.

Prior to carrying out the literature assessment, using a slightly tailored version of a combination of questionnaires was considered. However, once the problem area had been scoped out, two main issues were identified:

- Because of the broadness of the REA question, the studies under consideration for final inclusion were spread across such a span of aims and methodologies that existing tools could not be used to score all of them.

- Given the scientific immaturity of the field, a detailed quality appraisal would result in the exclusion of the totality of the studies. This outcome might be methodologically sound, but would not provide the REA users with any sort of guidance.

To address these issues, a custom quality assessment procedure was designed. First, the key dimensions on which the studies should be evaluated (Figure 11) were established. These were:

- weight of scientific evidence;
- relevance (usefulness);
- methodological quality.

The QAT was conceived as a series of filters, each of them addressing one of these three key dimensions. This iterative procedure provides a useful snapshot of the level of scientific development in the field, allowing for some evidence-synthesis while offering a clear appraisal of the scientific strength (or lack thereof) of this evidence.

Figure 11 Key dimension filters for quality assessment
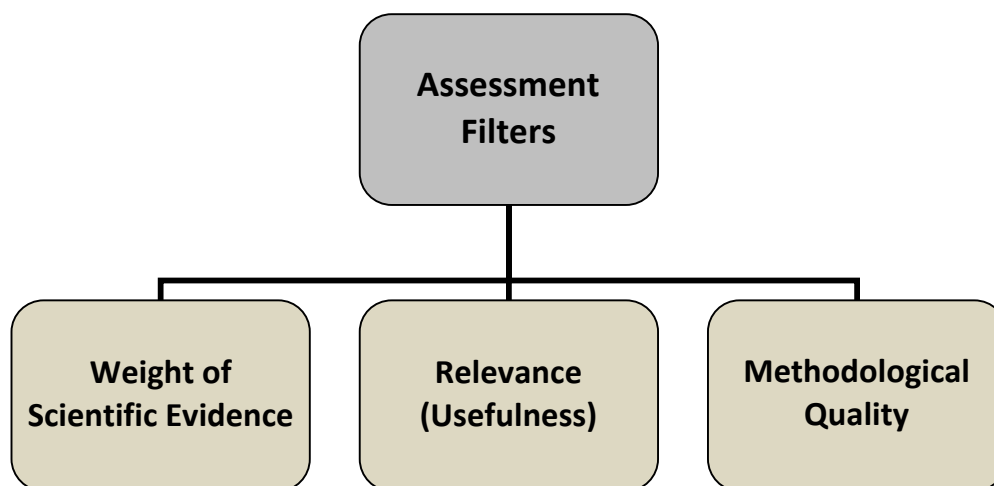
The *first quality filter* assesses the study's contribution to scientific understanding on a 1-to-5 scale. At the bottom of the scale (level 5) are observational studies and at the top (level 1) are evaluations of interventions (Table 4).[32]

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[32] Evaluations are at the top of the scale because an evaluation is by definition a test of the theory (explanation) upon which it is based.

In a scientifically-mature research field, a cut-off point for inclusion would have been set at Level 3. Here, such a strategy would have led to the exclusion of all studies.

Therefore, the decision was made to retain *Level 4* studies. At this level, the research may:

- contribute to an understanding of what needs to be explained, by identifying regularities in the background of radicalised individuals;

- identify factors that may be potential predictors or indicative of causal processes.

Table 4 First quality filter: Contribution to understanding

		Type of study
Scientific Understanding	Level 1	Intervention study - evaluation
Scientific Understanding	Level 2	Explanatory study - theory-testing - causes
Scientific Understanding	Level 3	Prediction study - population
Pre-Scientific Understanding	Level 4	Exploratory study - hypothesis-generation
Pre-Scientific Understanding	Level 5	Observational study - description

The *second quality filter* is two-pronged (Table 5):

- It involves an assessment of the study's *relevance* to the REA's research question. Studies that do not contribute to answering the question are excluded.

- It involves an assessment of the *methodological information provided*. Methodological appraisal can only be carried out meaningfully if enough detail about study methodology is available. In a systematic review, it is often possible to contact authors directly for clarification, but in an REA, this is not feasible.

If a study scored 'No' on either one of the questions, it was discarded. Otherwise, it was put through the third filter.

Table 5 Second quality filter: Relevance

1. Is the study's research question(s) relevant to the REA question(s)?	**Yes** **No**
2. Is sufficient information provided to appraise the methodological quality of the study?	**Yes** **No**

Is it worth continuing?

The point could be made that this filter should come first, but given the paucity of evidence in this field, it seemed worthwhile to identify studies with the potential to contribute to scientific understanding, even if they did not directly address the REA's question.

The relevance filter also allowed for input from the REA users. One study that would have been rejected by the researchers was retained because the users considered that the topic of the study (recruitment into Al Qa'ida-affiliated groups) was close enough to their interests to warrant further scrutiny.

The third and last quality filter was an assessment of methodological quality.

Once again, given the underdeveloped state of the field, the researchers decided that a detailed methodological appraisal would be unnecessary and would likely result in a very high rate of exclusion, leaving nothing to report. The remaining studies were scored on a basic assessment tool (Table 6).

Table 6 Third quality filter: Methodological appraisal

A: Can the methodology effectively be used to answer the study's research question(s)?

1. Is the study design effective in answering the research question(s)?	**Yes** **No**
2. Is the selection of research subjects/sampling strategy appropriate to the research question(s)?	**Yes** **No**
3. Are the data appropriate to the research question(s)?	**Yes** **No**
4. Is the analytical strategy appropriate to the research question(s)?	**Yes** **No**
5. Are conclusions clearly formulated?	**Yes** **No**

To qualify for final inclusion, studies had to achieve a minimum methodological fitness score of 3 out of 5 (at least 3 'Yes' answers).

APPENDIX G: Target literature search procedure (Neighbouring Problem Areas)

In the first instance, recent, high-quality narrative — and, when available, systematic — reviews in each of the Neighbouring Problem Areas (NPAs) were located, allowing the researchers to familiarise themselves with the state of research in these fields and with the terminology in use. Concepts and keywords that could be akin to the whole, or to some aspect of, the radicalisation process were identified.

The following terms were selected: *conversion, engagement, involvement, joining, membership, mobilisation, predisposition, propensity, protective factors, recruitment, risk factors, selection* and *socialisation.*

The project specifications provided by the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) users mentioned a special interest in learning from the social movement literature. However, that knowledge space was too broad to mine properly in the time available, so mining was restricted to the social movement literature on violent radical and terrorist groups.

Search and inclusion criteria had to be adjusted in the following ways:

- *Databases*: The search was limited to JSTOR, ISI Web of Science, SCOPUS, IBSS and GoogleScholar.

- *Cut-off date*: Much of the seminal research on new religious movements (NRMs) and violent radical groups was carried out in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, so no cut-off date was applied to these areas. However, the literature on gangs has a long history of empirical research. To keep the volume of documents manageable, only sampled studies published during or after 1999 were sampled.

- *Quality assessment*: Given the greater methodological sophistication of gang research generally compared with the other areas, the cut-off point of the 'Contribution to Understanding' filter was raised to Level 3.

Subject matter experts

To supplement the targeted searches, subject matter experts (SMEs) in each of the NPAs were contacted. These individuals were either known to the authors as experts in their field, or their names were provided by Home Office, Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT). The purpose of the REA was explained and they were asked to share knowledge of seminal or high quality empirical studies that might be relevant, as well as good quality reviews.

Several SMEs responded with links to relevant papers. Others expressed reservations regarding the transferability of knowledge from their areas to Al Qa'ida-influenced Radicalisation (AQIR) or questioned the conceptual validity of the notion of radicalisation in general, and AQIR in particular.

Search rationale

Congruent with the notion of a theory-driven REA, the project did not set out to achieve an exhaustive review of evidence in the NPAs. The studies identified should not be taken to constitute 'best evidence' or 'best knowledge' in these areas. Rather, the literature search was purposive.

Given the exploratory nature of this exercise, the researchers set out to identify seminal and meaningful concepts in NPAs that could supplement an understanding of AQIR. A heavy weight was placed on the *relevance* criteria. At least one study was included that skirted problem boundaries, but seemed of relevance to an aspect of the radicalisation process.

Non-exhaustive sampling is acceptable in this case, as the researchers did not set out to analyse the findings using statistical methods. Rather, this approach is akin to the conceptual synthesis used in qualitative systematic reviews. Conceptual synthesis aims to achieve some degree of conceptual saturation for the purpose of explanation, rather than to maximise study homogeneity for the purpose of prediction (Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009). In identifying relevant concepts in NPAs, the aim was to facilitate further knowledge integration.

Expertise bias

Expertise bias will have impacted the outcome of the targeted searches. Both of the authors are criminologists. It was much easier for them to locate key studies in their own problem area than in the NPAs, even with the contribution of SMEs. This means that relevant studies are more likely to have been overlooked in some NPAs than others and conceptual nuances missed.